Signs of the times
PAGE 8

Easter sunrise worship
PAGE 11

My pilgrimage
PAGE 14

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Tips on how to vote
PAGE 20

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The empty tomb

John 20

That woman was the first word spoken
must have taken even the angels by surprise,

who were used to bringing their fiery glory
down to the clanging swords of battlefields,

to priests tugging at their beards
in lamentation, to voices thundering in temples

and muscles hefting stones from mountaintops,
not to a trembling woman whose hair clung

to her neck with tears, who for a moment
held the souls of the nations like a basket of figs.

Tania Runyan *(featured on p. 10).*

Our gardening God:

Resurrection and the new creation

Rick VanManen

John is the only gospel writer to mention that the tomb in which Jesus was laid was in a garden. In fact, John mentions the garden twice in his burial narrative. The reason for this emphasis is tied to a major theme in John's gospel, a theme that we ought to have picked up from the very beginning of the story.

John begins his gospel with the words, "In the beginning," evoking the creation story of Genesis 1. Then, throughout the gospel, John tells how Jesus engages in a number of miraculous deeds of power that John calls signs. The first sign is the changing of water into wine. The second is the healing of the royal official's son; the third is the healing of the lame man by the pool. The fourth is the feeding of the five thousand; the fifth is the healing of the man born blind, and the sixth is the raising of Lazarus. Six miraculous deeds, six signs, all the signs pointing to the seventh and final sign, the crucifixion in John 19. What is John up to?

A big hint is found in signs three and five. Unlike the other gospels in which Jesus is accused of a number of crimes, not least of which is eating with tax collectors and sinners, the only crime Jesus is accused of in John's gospel is the breaking of the Sabbath. The healings in signs three and five both take place on the Sabbath,

See **Gardening God** *on page 2*

News

Gardening God *continued*

much to the dismay of the Jewish religious elite. The issue comes to a head in John 5. The Jewish leaders pick up stones to throw at Jesus after his controversial statement that his Father is at work on the Sabbath, and therefore he is at work as well. The implication is startling. For John, God is no longer resting on the Sabbath! With Genesis 1 as the background to the gospel, John wants us to understand that Jesus, the Word of God, this creative Word made flesh, is the one through whom God is engaging the forces of darkness and chaos and rescuing the world from. The arrival of Jesus on the scene of Israel's history is nothing less than the beginning of God's work of new creation.

Six miraculous deeds, six signs and six days of creation all culminating in the crucifixion. In John's gospel the crucifixion happens on the Friday, that is, on the sixth day. On the cross Jesus comes face to face with the chaos and darkness that God had to deal with way back in Genesis 1:2 when God first created the world. These forces that feed our fear and violence come against Jesus and literally overwhelm him. Yet when these forces come against the Son of God they are ultimately defeated, just as they were in the very beginning. So Jesus can declare that it is finished, echoing the completion of creation in Genesis 2:1-2. There follows, as in Genesis, a day of rest; Jesus remains in the tomb on the Sabbath.

'They have taken away my Lord'

Then, early on the first day of the week, the first day of the new creation, Mary Magdalene comes to the garden tomb while it is still dark, while the forces of chaos are still swirling. The stone has been moved and the body is gone. Mary runs back to tell the disciples. Peter and the disciple whom Jesus loves run to the tomb to confirm the terrible news. It's true. Someone has taken the body. They leave the tomb not understanding, although the disciple whom Jesus loves believes. Mary remains behind, weeping outside the tomb in the garden. She bends down to look into the tomb. It's not empty. Two angels are there. They ask Mary why she is weeping and Mary expresses to them her great lament, the lament of the disciples, of Israel, and of the world: "They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him."

In the resurrection God recommits himself to humanity.

Then she hears the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden. Unlike her first parents, Mary doesn't run and hide. She turns to see Jesus there. But she doesn't recognize him. She thinks he's just the gardener. It's an honest mistake. Gardening is what God is up to in Genesis 2. And as the new Adam, Jesus is tasked with transforming the chaos into the fruitful and flourishing creation. Recognition comes when Jesus calls Mary by name. It's hard to imagine Mary's surprise and joy when she realizes that Jesus is alive and well.

Jesus gives Mary the important task of telling his brothers that Jesus is "ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God." One can't help hearing echoes of Ruth's commitment to Naomi. Ruth's commitment allows for her inclusion in Israel; she becomes a member of the people of God and an ancestor of Jesus himself. That Jesus says these words suggests that in the resurrection God is recommitting himself to humanity, that God is once again entrusting himself and his purposes to us, God's image bearers in the world. The resurrection means that the disobedience and the curse of Genesis 3 is reversed and creation is put back on track.

So Mary Magdalene (or was her name Eve?), the mother of the new humanity, the disciple turned into the first apostle, left the garden. She is sent out not because of disobedience but to complete the task that had begun so long ago in another garden, the task of tending and keeping the garden of creation so that God will be all in all.

Rick VanManen is the Christian Reformed Campus Minister at the University of Alberta in Edmonton.

The Empty Tomb *on page 1*

Rik Berry and his wife Cathy raised six children in the Annapolis Valley, Nova Scotia, where they currently live. Together they lead Valley Gate Vineyard, a network of emerging church communities, and operate an art gallery in their old Victorian house. With an M. Div. and a B.A. in Fine Art, Berry sees "God both in nature and moving today in the lives of people." Christian Courier *is grateful for his permission to print The Empty Tomb; more of Berry's work can be viewed at* ***rikberry.com.***

A pre-election conversation

OTTAWA, Ont. – As millions of people in the Middle East and North Africa continue to struggle towards democracy, Canadians go to the polls May 2 for the third time since 2006. By and large, the leadership of Canada's four major political parties has not changed, which partially explains the non-cooperative, stagnant culture that has plagued the House of Commons for the last half-decade.

Conservative Party

Stephen Harper's popularity among a solid 30 percent of the Canadian electorate has been his blessing since taking office in 2006; his inability to attract an extra 10 percent to achieve a majority government has been his curse. Under Harper, the Conservatives come into this election with very little new business on the agenda. The populist campaign promises they have made thus far come with conditions, such as only implementing budgetary measures until the federal budget can be balanced – likely in 2015.

On the whole, the Tories continue to broadcast their adept handling of the economy through the global recession, as well as their business-friendly priorities for the future. In addition to their stay-the-course platform, however, the Conservatives are betting on Canadians to blame the Opposition parties for an unnecessary election, a potential coalition government and platforms that allegedly jeopardize Canada's economic recovery. *– Brendan Kooy*

Liberal Party

As leader of the Liberal Party, Michael Ignatieff has an uphill battle. In the face of a very successful smear campaign by the Conservatives that paints him as an American intellectual "just passing through," Ignatieff has struggled to connect with average Canadians. Following a cross-Canada summer bus tour in 2010, his popularity as a potential leader still lags behind Harper.

This election, the Liberals are attempting to depict themselves as the only viable option to replace a government they view as undemocratic, uncooperative and unresponsive to the needs of Canadians. Election platforms include spending in education and health care, largely paid for by repealing corporate tax rates to 18 percent. It's likely that a Liberal victory in May will not necessarily come down to their platform but by their ability to reverse the tide of Conservative criticism of Mr. Ignatieff as a leader and whether they can out-do the Tories on the economy. *– Brendan Kooy*

The NDP

Jack Layton is certainly leading the most heroic campaign of all the major party leaders, limping along the campaign trail on a recently repaired hip. But while Layton's personal work ethic continues to impress, his party does not enjoy the same positive perception.

Like the Liberals, the NDP has been consistently critical of the mode of operation of the Harper government. Besides a pledge to operate more democratically and civilly, the NDP has tabled a platform that delivers financial aid to rural healthcare, seniors and maintaining government service programs. *– Brendan Kooy*

The Bloc Québécois

Gilles Duceppe leads the Bloc, a separatist party by trade, into another election when many Quebec voters know that actual secession from Canada is not a realistic goal. As such, the Bloc under Duceppe has become a leverage tool to command the respect and dollars of Canada's federal government.

Duceppe enjoys a highly popular image of a hard-working, determined politician amongst the Bloc's Quebec base. With a campaign platform aimed mainly at supporting the Quebec economy, the most interesting issue could be funding for a NHL arena in Quebec City. So far, parties are split on the concept, with the Bloc of course supporting the pledge. *– Brendan Kooy*

Called to account:

The fact that the Conservative government fell because it was found in contempt of Parliament suggests that there is a need for more transparency, full information and accountability in government. *– Chandra Pasma*

Clouding the point:

The debate over whether or not a coalition is legitimate when coalitions are a common element of other Westminster parliaments highlights the ways in which election debates can obscure truth for the sake of partisan gain. *– Chandra Pasma*

Restricted information:

The exclusion of Elizabeth May from the leaders' debates by a consortium of media broadcasters raises questions about the role of the media in determining whose voices Canadians will be allowed to hear. *– Chandra Pasma*

What's a Christian to do?

We as citizens need to ask our candidates and their leaders hard questions. Our number one concern should not be "What will you do for me and my family?" but "What will you do to promote public justice and the common good?" We need to evaluate policies based on how they treat the poor, the marginalized and the newcomer, not just on how they impact us. We need to question whether party platforms promote the common good or the narrow interests of a few voters.

If we are complacent about democracy, we will lose it. If we are apathetic about the common good, we will not achieve it. If we acquiesce to injustice, it will grow. If we do not demand accountable government, we will not receive it. The choice is ours.

– Chandra Pasma

**For info on the Christian Heritage Party, see page 20.*

News

From the Lab

Rudy Eikelboom

Easter trumps humanity's fall

The events we celebrate on Good Friday and Easter, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who was both fully human and truly God, are at the centre of our faith. In these events, God radically changes the relationship between the creation and the Creator: through Christ, we are grafted into the Godhead; we become God's children. While it may be extreme, an argument could be mounted that in relation to this life, all other parts of our faith are secondary.

Christ's life, death, and resurrection are miracles – beyond science, beyond the normal processes of creation that are open to science. They cannot be found or tested for in the lab. Christ's unique time on earth, initiated by a miraculous conception and birth, apparently ending with a painful death, and then continuing with a glorious resurrection, must be accepted in faith. The consequences of Jesus' life and many events surrounding it are open to study, but the facts of Jesus' life cannot be scientifically proven or, for that matter, disproven.

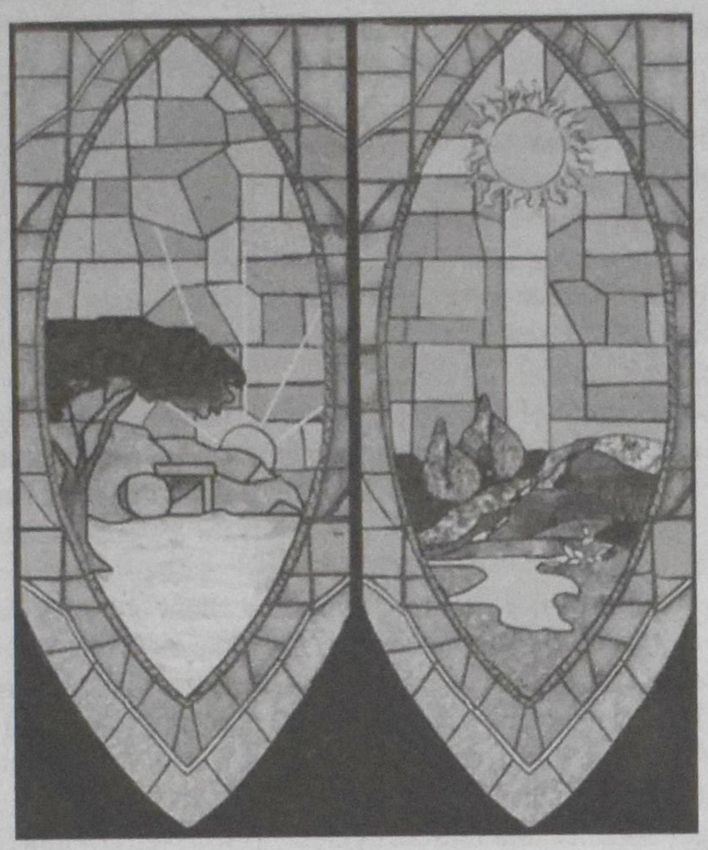
In contrast, it is legitimate, even necessary, for us to hold up our other beliefs against the mirror of science and our discoveries about creation. Our understanding of how to read God's Word, the Bible, can and should be informed by science.

A classic example of how science can change theology and biblical interpretation is the transition from a geocentric to a heliocentric cosmology in the time of Galileo. When we read Psalm 104:5, "[The Lord] set the earth on its foundations; it can never be moved," we don't see it as proof that our sun revolves around a stationary earth. But before Galileo, Christians did interpret the Bible in this way, and their faith was utterly transformed as they came to understand that the earth was not, as they had believed, the centre of creation but rather the third planet of a secondary sun in an arm of one of a multitude of galaxies. Now we realize that the world's location within the universe is not at the heart of our faith, but at the time of Galileo, Christians believed that to reject the earth's place as the centre of God's creation was to reject the notion that humans are God's image-bearers.

Anthrocentric bias

Christians have been dealing with a similar issue in our understanding of the place of humans in our world. Based on Genesis 1 and 2, traditional Christian theology names Adam and Eve as our literal first parents, the first two human beings created by God, and it elevates humans to a special status within creation built on the notion that we are made in God's image. In this theology, Christ's life and death are seen as a necessary consequence of a specific historical event, that is, Adam and Eve's fall into sin.

The problem is that scientific discoveries present a contrasting picture of humanity. The revolution in the life sciences, usually dated from Darwin's work and theory of evolution, sweeps the notion of a special



place for humans off the table. Humans are now seen as part of the natural order, evolving – as all living creatures have – from common ancestors. From a biological, genetic and psychological perspective, we are different in degree, not kind, from our nearest relatives, the great apes. Unless God is a malicious joker, the scientific evidence is overwhelming: humans are a member of the animal kingdom, as unique as – but no more than – any other species.

I believe that we need to adjust our theology to fit within this scientific evidence. We may need to reform some old frameworks for thinking about God's relation to us. The place and importance of Adam and Eve in our theology may diminish, and the way we explain the pain evident in our world may change. Some articles of faith once held as central, such as a historical Fall, may also need to be reframed.

I can't predict the contours of the new consensus; they will be unclear for some time. In this period of reworking our theology, we can expect tensions, misunderstandings and arguments. Theological reformations have historically spilt blood, both physical and metaphysical; they have divided Christians who once walked and prayed together.

In times of uncertainty such as this, we need to hold on clearly and tightly to the essentials of the faith, that is, the death and resurrection of Christ. We need to hold on to God's gift of Jesus to our creation with the realization that this season of Easter represents the start of a new life for the new creation, the New Jerusalem. And we need to pray. Let's pray to our Father that, as we travel through this challenge to our faith represented by the findings of the life sciences, we may move *in love* from the uncertainty and brokenness of Good Friday to the promise and joy of Easter.

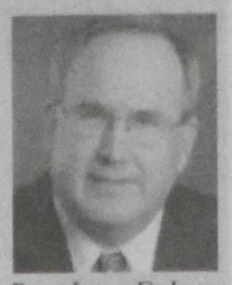
Rudy Eikelboom (reikelboom@wlu.ca) lives in Waterloo and is Chair of the Psychology Dept. at Wilfred Laurier U.

What's **your** story? A last-minute reminder about the *Christian Courier* Short Story Contest!

I: Send in your original short fiction (1000 to 3000 words) on any theme by May 1, 2011. First prize receives $100 and publication in a summer issue of *Christian Courier*. Second prize receives a year's subscription. All stories must be submitted electronically to *cathy@christiancourier.ca*. Entries over the word limit will not be considered.

II: Our readers 8 to 14 years of age can participate in the category for youth. Send your short stories (500 - 1000 words) to *cathy@christiancourier.ca* before May 1, 2011. The two best submissions will win a gift certificate to Toys'R'Us valued at $50 (first place) and $25 (second place). All stories will be considered for publication in *CC*.

CRCNA executive director resigns



Rev. Jerry Dykstra

Rev. Bruce Adema

BURLINGTON, Ont. (CRCNA) – Rev. Jerry Dykstra has resigned as executive director of the Christian Reformed Church in North America. The decision was effective April 5, 2011 and was announced by Rev. Mark Vermaire, president of the CRC's board of trustees.

In a statement issued to churches, pastors and denominational staff, Vermaire said, "After five and a half years of serving the denomination, Rev. Jerry Dykstra informed the CRC Board of Trustees of his desire to resign as Executive Director of the CRCNA for personal and family reasons. The board agreed that this was appropriate at this time and accepted the resignation."

Simultaneous meetings were held in the denominational offices in Burlington, Ont., and Palos Heights, Ill.

Canadian interim director

Vermaire said that until an interim executive director is named, Rev. Bruce Adema, the current director of Canadian Ministries, will fulfill the essential functions of the executive director. An interim leader will be named as soon as possible, Vermaire said. At *CC*'s press time that had not yet occurred. The search for a permanent executive director will also begin and the board hopes to present a candidate to the CRC synod in June 2012.

The resignation came after discussion between Dykstra and the board. Vermaire said, "We are thankful for Jerry and his gifts and we pray for him as Jerry and his family pursue a new direction. We are thankful for him and his leadership over the last five and a half years . . . and ask God to bless him in every way."

Dykstra served as executive director of the CRCNA since 2006. Prior to that, he was director of Denominational Ministries for one year. He was ordained as a pastor in 1990. He served congregations in Cascade, Michigan, and in Walnut Creek, California.

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Editorials

Finding guidance on issues of science and faith

Henry J. Baron

My "creation-science" education began very early in life. When my dad read the Bible after meals, the story of creation never failed to excite my imagination: God making the world by crying across the dark emptiness of nothingness, "Let there be!" The magnificent tale rivaled the best fairy tale I knew. Best of all, it was true! The conviction of its literal truth was reinforced by Christian school and church in the years that followed.

Somewhere along the way I heard about Darwin, but in my bubbled existence he emerged as an Enemy to be bitingly denounced, and was therefore easy to ignore. Christians were to be guided by Truth, and for that we went to God's Word, the Bible, not science.

College introduced me to other truths. The professors were good. I admired them for their brilliance and credibility. I respected them for their humane decency and trusted their integrity. And when I learned facts and insights that were different from what I thought I knew and had believed, these were not so easily dismissed. In biology I learned about the work of Darwin; in genetics, the work of Mendel. My simple world of biblical truth facts was assailed by complicating science findings, and I suffered a severe case of cognitive dissonance. I felt my faith tottering.

Fossils, rock formations, mutation, genetic recombination – all were telling stories of time and change that differed from the story in my mind since childhood. Changing one's childhood assumptions and convictions is difficult and traumatic. When such stories, especially biblical stories, taken as truth prove wrongly understood, support is needed. In college, I needed the church that had taught me to come to my aid. I needed it to lay out the contradictions and guide me in reaching an understanding that would help me both appreciate the responsible work of research scientists and reinforce my shaken faith in the God of the Bible. I needed it to consider openly with me the questions provoked by the search for truth in God's creation and in his special revelation.

But there was no support.

Instead I found that the church was largely in denial. What biologists, geologists, archeologists, anthropologists and others were saying was either ignored or roundly denounced as false because it conflicted with the Bible. Most churchgoers were all too ready to agree. Some felt betrayed and dropped out. Others, like me, went on uneasily living between two worlds: the world of science and its ongoing findings, and the world of faith disturbed by those findings and by an unsympathetic church.

Closed ears of the church

When I transferred in my senior year to Calvin College, I became acquainted with John De Vries's book *Beyond the Atom*. "Doc" De Vries, an amiable, humble Christian scholar showed how the findings of "ungodly science" that pointed to an old earth were compatible with our Christian faith. It resolved a good chunk of my dissonance and faith struggles. My former pastor Tymen Hofman discovered in a geology course at the University of Alberta the evidence for a much older earth than his church had recognized. His faith was severely shaken. He too, with profound relief, found a Christian's answer in *Beyond the Atom* when he came to Calvin College.

But now it's not just a question of whether God used millions of years to create our present world through a process of evolution, but whether that same process was also used to create human kind. Many voices asserted as much for a long time, of course, but, as before, we dismissed them as God-denying enemies of the truth.

We cannot do that now.

Today, biologists and others, Christian and non-Christian, tell us that all life forms are products of evolution. What we believers face now is an issue that goes a lot deeper than the rotation of the earth or its age. We urgently need guidance.

We need to listen to what trustworthy scientists have to tell us.* We need our theologians and pastors to sit down with those scientists, too, and with each other to consider some very vexing questions, and ultimately to give guidance to those who wonder: what then of Adam and Eve, the fall, and the origin of sin?

Thoughtful forums on this issue have been in full swing on the Calvin campus since fall, widely attended by faculty across the disciplines. They will continue.

There are and will be disagreements, and that's to be expected and welcomed. But any genuine search for the truth about anything will not be strident. It's a calling for the humble who know their limitations and the need for tentativeness.

But what we all do agree on is this: God made us, and our eternal comfort is that we belong to him, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

* *A very helpful resource is available online at* ***biologos.org****; the BioLogos Foundation explores, promotes and celebrates the integration of science and Christian faith.*

Henry J. Baron is professor of English (emeritus) at Calvin College, and the author most recently of Talking with God *(2011).*

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EDITORIAL TEAM & PRODUCTION STAFF

Editor: Angela Reitsma Bick **editor@christiancourier.ca**
Features Editor: Cathy Smith **cathy@christiancourier.ca**
Church Page Editor: Marian Van Til **marianvantil@roadrunner.com**
Review Editor: Nick Schuurman **reviews@christiancourier.ca**
Contributing Editor: Bert Witvoet **bert.witvoet@sympatico.ca**
Contributing Editor: Peter Schuurman **eternalstudent@sympatico.ca**
Admin/Bus.ads/Web: Ineke Medcalf-Strayer **ads@christiancourier.ca**
Circulation/Fam.ads: Rose der Nederlanden **rose@christiancourier.ca**

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Christian Courier
5 Joanna Dr, St. Catharines ON L2N 1V1
Tel: 905-682-8311; 1-800-969-4838
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The Belhar Confession: *a lamp to our feet*

Bert Witvoet

In my previous editorial I described my second visit to the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa. I ended by saying that I would write about the Belhar Confession, and discuss whether or not the Christian Reformed Church should adopt it at next year's Synod. The Belhar Confession was forged in the smithy of Apartheid in 1986, eight years before a democratic election swept the Apartheid government out of office. So my acquaintance with the Apartheid system through visual and verbal documentaries at the museum, through stories told to me by victims of Apartheid, plus my contact with several Afrikaners who continue to deny that Apartheid was a sinful system, prepared my heart and mind for a sympathetic reading of the Belhar Confession.

The five articles of this confession contain beautiful statements about unity, reconciliation and justice. They have the same power as the Gospel to cleanse and to comfort. They are like streams of living water that make the desert of injustice and alienation bloom. They bring healing and life to wounded souls. The Belhar is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. Had the churches of South Africa lived by its precepts, Apartheid would not have been implemented and the seeds of hatred and suspicion would not have been sown in this amazing part of God's creation, so wonderfully blessed with treasures of nature, rich resources and fascinating people – white, brown and black. I love what the Belhar confesses.

Although the Belhar does not mention Apartheid by name, it has Apartheid in mind, as it clearly focuses on "the forced separation of people on the grounds of race and color." There are only a few countries in the world where authorities actually forced separation of people based on race and colour, countries such as Nazi Germany and South Africa during the Apartheid years. So it might be argued that the Belhar Confession applies to South Africa more than to any other jurisdiction.

At the same time, few will deny that the Confession addresses racism wherever it raises its head, and it focuses on the obligation of the church everywhere to make unity visible, to seek reconciliation and to seek justice for the downtrodden and wronged. As such the Belhar addresses the Christian Reformed Church in North America with the same urgency as it does churches in South Africa.

Some people don't like the fact that the Belhar states that "God is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged," and that the church "must stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged." The wording is not exactly what a person familiar with the Bible would choose. God does not automatically take sides, even when a person is wronged. But how far removed are these statements from what we read in Psalm 146:7: "He upholds the cause of the oppressed and gives food to the hungry." Can't we allow for a bit of poetic license when we confess solidarity with the wronged?

And yet, I am not totally convinced that the Christian Reformed Church should adopt the Belhar Confession as a fourth confession.

Why adopt a confession (which is a momentous thing come to think of it. We haven't added a confession to the church since 1619!) for one sinful practice called racism or heresy called Apartheid? What about abortion on demand, or divorce, or materialism, or euthanasia, or homophobia? All of these have been defended or justified by Christians in a way that threatens the witness of the church just as much as racism.

Instead, why not take the content of the Belhar and use part of it to add a robust paragraph to the Contemporary Testimony about the evils of racism? We could make reference to the Belhar as a supporting document. And while we are at rewriting the Contemporary Testimony, why not add other heresies and sinful practices that threaten the life of the Church of Christ? The church continues to have many blind spots, and we would serve the cause of Christ and his gospel well by expanding this eloquent Testimony to even more forcefully capture its overall theme: "Our world belongs to God." As a Christian who feels challenged to be culturally involved in bringing Christ's kingship to the fore in our world, I find the Contemporary Testimony more useful than all three Confessions combined anyway.

Bert Witvoet lives in St. Catharines, Ontario with his wife Alice and is a Contributing Editor for CC.

Letters

CRWRC on its approach and links to KAIROS

In "A Proposal to Proceed Modestly" (March 28, 2011), John A. Tamming questions how much impact the broad reach of the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee (CRWRC) could have on the people it serves. He questions the efficiency with which we deliver aid and suggests that it might be time for CRWRC to review our priorities.

I would agree with Mr. Tamming that as a relatively small denomination we have to prioritize how we can best address the needs in our world. In the past few years, CRWRC has been doing just that. In a drive to achieve higher quality programs while operating in an environment of a tight economy, we've reduced the number of countries and partners we work with to sharpen our focus and home in on where we can do the greatest amount of good for those in need.

Mr. Tamming's suggestion that a denomination and organization of our size should focus on one specific country or region, however, is short-sighted. Despite our size, CRWRC can and does have significant and meaningful impact in a large number of communities. The secret lies in how we work.

In all of our programs, CRWRC works with local churches and community organizations. These partners have expertise about their communities and access to those in need. We train leaders from these organizations, and they in turn reach out to multiple communities. Through this process CRWRC minimizes the number of our staff in each country and is able to reach a large number of people with a small budget. This process also equips local leaders who will be around for the long-term, working to improve their communities even after CRWRC staff and funds have left.

In addition, CRWRC's approach to ministry looks at the whole community. This means that we train local leaders to go beyond digging a well or providing a school. Instead, we ask them to consider values, systems and structures that might need to be addressed in order for problems to be overcome. Our goal is to empower communities to address problems on their own with maximum use of their own assets. While it takes time to build relationships, provide training, and allow people to help themselves, it leads to permanent change.

While Mr. Tamming doesn't describe what he means by "meaningful impact," this is a crucial part of CRWRC's community development programs. We work with every community that we serve to identify what meaningful change would look like to them. We ask for their ownership of the goals before any program is started. Then, once goals have been developed we direct all our resources towards achieving them. We know we are having meaningful impact because we've "graduated" hundreds of communities who have met their own definitions of success.

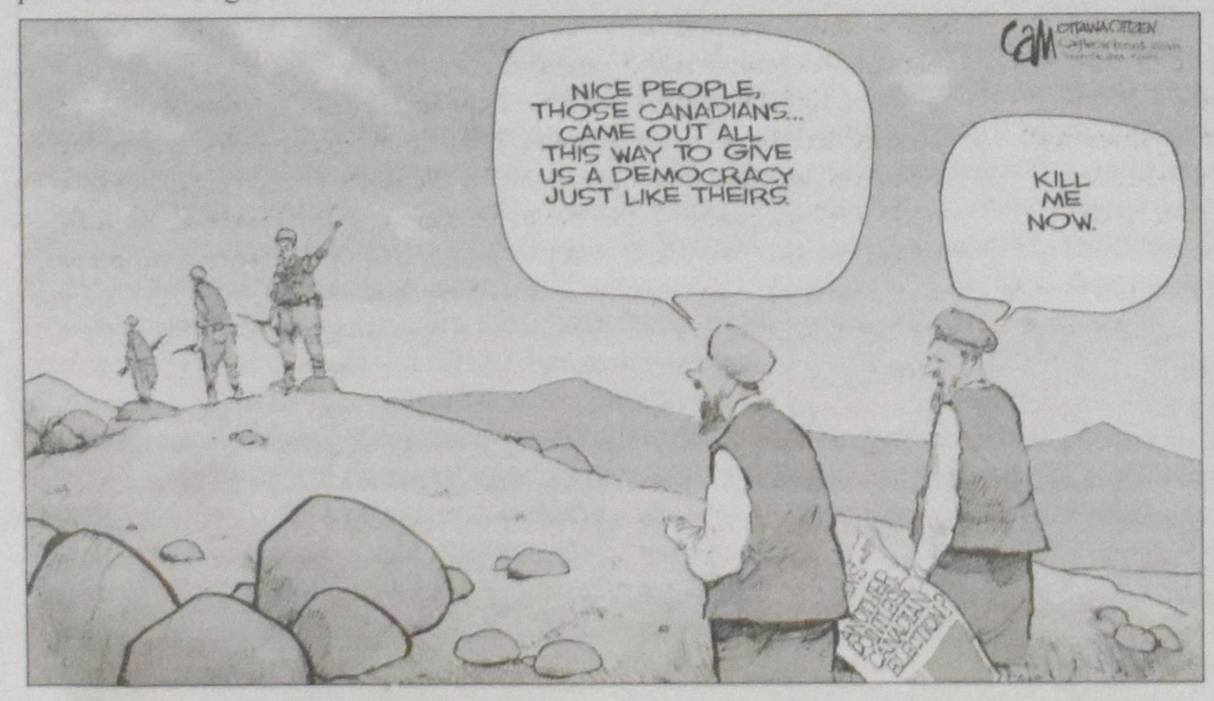
I would like to include one final point of clarification about our relationship with KAIROS. Mr. Tamming suggests that CRWRC's funding from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) had been denied because of our membership in KAIROS. I'm grateful to have the opportunity to respond to this incorrect statement because it isn't the first time we've heard it.

The fact is it is the Christian Reformed Church in North America – Canada Corporation, not CRWRC who is a member of KAIROS. In addition, while CRWRC does collaborate with KAIROS on specific projects that are relevant to our work, this association was not the reason behind CIDA's recent funding decision.

Instead, like many other organizations (some of whom are not associated with KAIROS) CRWRC's funding was denied because of administrative and procedural changes within CIDA. The framework for submitting proposals had been changed, and CRWRC's proposal, submitted under the previous framework, did not meet the new criteria.

The communication CRWRC received from CIDA regarding its decision was clear that the proposal was declined for technical reasons, not because of affiliations with any specific organizations. The communication has been extremely positive and we have been encouraged to continue our relationship with them under the new funding arrangements. We are hopeful that our programs will continue to receive funding from CIDA in the future.

Ida Kaastra-Mutoigo,
CRWRC Director



CC: Keeping Kuyper's vision alive

Last June I had the privilege and honour to speak at a Dutch day in Moorefield, Ontario. In that speech I quoted Groen Van Prinsterer, who said in July of 1868 that, "Modern society, with all its exceptionally good things, is nevertheless caught up in service to a theory of unbelief. That society is tempted ever more to a systematic denial of the living God" [free translation mine]. Groen came with a clarion call for a reformational world and life view and challenged people to live out that worldview. What would that great forerunner of Dr. Abraham Kuyper say today?!

We need to be informed by such a biblical worldview. Reading church magazines such as *The Banner*, for example, is not sufficient. A church paper often writes about "churchy" things in a narrow sense, but not sufficiently about the kingdom of God in all its fullness. Because of this, a newspaper such as *Christian Courier* should be in all of our homes. Its excellent articles look at world happenings as well as other aspects of life in the light of scripture. We need to get more mature as well as younger people to read this paper.

Last June I asked whether parents should give our adult children a subscription to *Christian Courier*. Yes! A reformational magazine like *Christian Courier* needs to stay alive. Thankfully many Christians outside the reformed tradition feel attracted to the motto of Dr. Abraham Kuyper – that there is not a square inch in the entire universe which Christ does not claim as his own. Think of people like Charles Colson, Os Guinness, Mark Knoll and many others. That vision better be kept alive in our pulpits as well as in our Christian Schools. We impoverish ourselves if we don't.

I want to add that I have finally followed up on my own advice and have given a year's subscription to each of our four children. I hope many of you will follow suit.

Blessings on Christian
Reformational journalism,
Pastor Ralph Koops
St. George, Ont.

The voter's paradox

Who to vote for? Harper has been a disappointment, his much heralded accountability legislation pure window dressing, and the concentration of power in the PMO greater than ever. Harper started out as a reformer, but the Reform Party's promise to do things differently in Ottawa is a distant, long-forgotten memory.

For example, entrenched political party interests again made a mockery of the nomination process. In most ridings, incumbents received a coronation. No contest at all! In the case of contests, the process was frequently rigged to benefit party insiders. Some democracy!

Nomination contests should be administered by Elections Canada, held on one common day for all parties in each riding and be open to all on the voters list. Voters would vote for candidates of the party of their choice only and ballots would list the candidates as submitted by the party. Such a primary election to obtain a party's nomination would also ensure that an MP's loyalty to her voters is stronger than to her party.

But what can voters do under our archaic voting system?

I'll vote for a party and candidate committed to taking the nomination process out of the hands of political parties, even if it means wasting my vote. In the absence of electoral reform, introducing a primary election holds the greatest promise of preserving democracy and accountability in our governing institutions.

Preserving the integrity of our institutions is more important than immediate bread and butter issues. Wholesale disregard for democratic principles, honesty and rule of law diminishes all Canadians. Citizenship is a calling and a common responsibility enhanced by responsive public institutions. Why tell our young people to vote when the opportunity for meaningful participation is so impoverished?

Christians should use this election to press for institutional changes with a lasting effect.

Nick Loenen
Richmond, B.C.

Christian Courier

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North America-Japan: Reformed ties run deep

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (CRCNA) – The faculty at Calvin Theological Seminary (CTS) is offering praise and thanksgiving that the Japanese students, missionaries and pastors they know survived the massive earthquake and tsunami on March 11, says Richard Sytsma, a former missionary to Japan and dean of students at CTS. Sytsma himself grew up in Japan as the son of Christian Reformed World Mission missionaries. He then returned to Japan after his seminary studies to serve as a missionary, along with his wife.

Connections between the seminary and Japan run deep, notes Sytsma. Several Japanese students have studied and two are still studying at Calvin Seminary. Some of the former students are now pastors in the "great quake" zone. The Japanese with connections to CTS are not having an easy time of it – as is the case with many thousands of other Japanese citizens.

"It is hard to imagine what the people, both the earthquake victims and relief workers from organizations such as the Reformed Church in Japan, are having to face every day," Sytsma says. We know from news reports, for example, that highly-toxic plutonium from the nuclear power plant damaged by the tsunami has seeped into the soil outside.

"People in Japan are living on the edge, wondering what will come next." Sytsma and his wife have not visited all of the towns and communities along the 300-mile stretch of shoreline severely impacted by the disaster. But previously they were "in the area where the earthquake and tsunami took place many times, the last time in June of last year, when we visited my daughter-in-law's parents in Sendai," Sytsma says. His daughter-in-law, Hiroko Koriyama Sytsma, graduated from CTS.

Spared, but hungry

Hiroko reported that her parents, grandmother and extended family members, who live in Sendai, the major city closest to the epicenter of the March 11 earthquake, were all spared. "Hiroko's parents and surrounding neighbours struggle with a shortage of food and fuel, but people are getting by – building a community and sharing what they have," says Sytsma. The families of the current CTS students Hitomi Urushizaki and Reita Yazawa do not live in the region most affected by the earthquake and, so far, are doing fine.

Sytsma has been paying close attention to any information about the Reformed Church in Japan that has been sent his way. As a missionary, Sytsma worked closely with the RCJ. He has learned that Rev. Takashi Yoshida, a Ph.D. candidate at CTS and the pastor of the Sendai Reformed Church, is alive and heading an ecumenical relief group that provides food, shelter and other necessities to the people of the hard-hit city of Sendai.

Yoshida is also moderator of the RCJ General Assembly, which represents the churches of the RCJ. His church building suffered some damage but is structurally intact. The homes of some members of the church also suffered damage, some of it very severe.

Rev. Keisuke Yoshioka, pastor of Canaan Reformed Church in Sendai, reports that he opened his still-intact church, allowing it to serve as a shelter for people who lost their homes until they were able to find more suitable living quarters. "All the earthquake victims who camped out in the church have now moved to other places," says Sytsma.

Liquefaction

With Yoshioka, there is also a CTS connection. Yoshioka has been invited by CTS and will arrive in a few months to spend some time as a research scholar to work on two advanced degrees.

Meanwhile, Ishinomaki Reformed Church, one of the 16 churches in the Northeastern Presbytery of the RCJ was irreparably damaged. The pastor is living in a shelter, says Sytsma.

The pastor of Fukushima Reformed Church, the church closest to the nuclear reactors, and his family have evacuated to the pastor's son-in-law's home in Shizuoka Prefecture.

Sytsma says liquefaction problems face RCJ churches near Tokyo Bay. The Inage Kaigan Reformed Church and the Shin Urayasu Reformed Church, pastored by CTS graduate Takayuki Ashida, are built on land reclaimed from the Tokyo Bay.

Rev. Takashi Yoshida, pastor of Sendai Reformed Church.

Sendai Reformed Church.

When the earthquake hit, the ground split and water from the bay rushed to the surface. Due to the liquefaction, the plumbing, drainage and sewage systems of Shin Urayasu Church (including the Ashida residence), says Sytsma, are in disarray, "a total mess; the sinks, toilets, showers are unusable."

The Ashidas, like their neighbours on Tokyo Bay, have needed to use city-provided port-a-potties, bottled drinking water and bath facilities.

But Rev. Ashida, his daughter, Kana, and his son Toru, who just returned home after a 10-week stay with the Sytsmas in Grand Rapids, have left the area and are now in Northeast Japan helping the RCJ church people there.

Increased openness to the gospel

In a difficult undertaking, the RCJ General Assembly and Presbytery Diaconal Committees are working to organize volunteer relief efforts, furnish shelters for victims and send money, food and supplies to northeastern Japan.

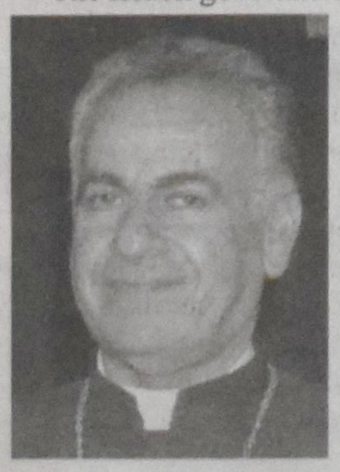
Sytsma expressed his gratitude for Christian Reformed World Missions and what the Christian Reformed World Relief Committee are also doing to help the relief effort.

Sytsma says all of the damage and uncertainty created by the largest recorded earthquake in Japan's history is an opportunity for Christian witness. "Japanese Christians and missionaries report sincere gratitude on the part of suffering people for the efforts of the Christian churches to distribute food, water and needed resources. They also report an increased interest in the gospel," he says.

Christian leaders protest Israeli taxes on church property, ouster of Anglican bishop

JERUSALEM (CatholicCulture/AsiaNews) – Christian leaders in Israel have joined in a protest against the Israeli government's refusal to grant a residency permit to an Anglican bishop, and against new taxes imposed on church institutions.

The Israeli government has denied a residency permit to Anglican Bishop Suheil Dawani, a native of the West Bank. Though Bishop Dawani was born in Nablus in the West Bank he is considered a "foreigner" in East Jerusalem, a territory occupied by Israel and the Cathedral and Anglican curia are located there. He may reside there only with special permission which has been denied him by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior.



As a result, he is unable to use the Anglican cathedral and diocesan offices in East Jerusalem. The leaders of Christian churches in Israel are protesting that decision, saying that it sets an unfortunate precedent.

Church leaders are "deeply concerned" by the decision because it constitutes "a precedent in attempts by the Israeli authorities to deny his residence in Jerusalem at the head of one of the Churches of the Holy City."

According to information gathered by AsiaNews there is already another Christian bishop threatened with expulsion from Jerusalem for "crimes of opinion."

The Christian leaders are also protesting new taxes imposed on church properties, calling the government move "an aggressive action." They pointed out that such impositions mark "a radical departure from the consistent practice of every previous State to have governed any part of the Holy Land, including the Ottoman empire, the British Mandate, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the State of Israel itself" – as well as the terms of UN Resolution 247 which established the Israeli state.

The defense of the Anglican bishop's residency permit and criticism of the new tax are interconnected: according to information obtained by AsiaNews, some prelates have been threatened with expulsion from Jerusalem, if they do not withdraw their support from criticism of the new taxes. This is why Christian leaders are deeply worried.

Christians in Jerusalem

The heads of Christian churches in Jerusalem include the Greek Orthodox Patriarch, the Latin Patriarch, the Armenian Patriarch, the Custos of the Holy Land and the Archbishops and Bishops of the Armenian Catholic, Coptic Orthodox, Ethiopian Orthodox, Greek Catholic, Maronite, Syrian Orthodox, Syrian Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran churches.

Russian Orthodox Church fears Islamists' arrival in Arab world

MOSCOW (CCO) – The Russian Orthodox Church is concerned that religious extremists may seize power in North Africa and the Middle East in the wake of the recent civil wars and regime change in Egypt.

"Changes in political regimes and a collision of interests of different social forces may lead to uncertainty, violence and lawlessness," says Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, chief ecumenical office of the Russian Orthodox Church. Radical Islamists, notorious for their calls for violence against Jews and Christians may come to power in these regions, says Hilarion.

"We have been observing growth in Christian-ophobia, which may deteriorate into a plunder of Christian churches and killings of Christians. The world community must rise to defend the basic human right to freely choose a religion and to live abiding by the religious norms and principles."

News

Studies: Canadian Catholics losing faith in Liberals

CC **staff,** *with files from ipolitics.ca*

OTTAWA – Catholic voters used to be a pillar of support that for years helped Liberals maintain themselves as the dominant force in Canadian politics. But that support has eroded, according to two separate studies.

In the past three elections the Catholic vote has played a role in the Liberal decline, according to Elisabeth Gidengil. Gidengil teaches at McGill University and wrote *Dominance and Decline*, a forthcoming book about the fall of the Liberal party.

There are almost 15 million Catholics in Canada, which is 44 percent of the population. They comprise the largest single group among Canadian Christians and are by far the most dominant religious group in the country.

Though the defection of immigrants from the Liberal party has been a mainstream story for several years, virtually no one but the Catholic press – until now – has covered the shift in Catholic voters' attitudes.

Gidengil is also a co-author of a 2009 analysis of the last four federal elections. The Canadian Election Study is an ongoing examination of voting trends. The analysis, according to Janice Tibbetts of ipolitics.ca, concluded that Catholic support for the Liberals has dropped dramatically. In the 2000 election it stood at 54 percent; in 2008 only 30 percent of Catholics voted Liberal. To whom did most Catholics move instead? To the Conservatives, who in 2008 received 40 percent of the Catholic vote.

Another study, by Angus Reid Strategies, examined voter patterns of 2004, 2006 and 2008. It, too, found that Catholics have steadily shifted to the Conservatives. "If I were the Liberals I'd be horrified that I alienated a big chunk of the base," Andrew Grenville, an Angus Reid chief research officer, told ipolitics. "I don't know if they [Catholics] are at the stage where they want to forgive and forget, or whether it's over."

Grenville asserted that traditional Catholic allegiance to the Liberals "goes back to the communitarian nature of Catholicism, about embracing the community rather than individualism." Ironically, Catholic support of Liberals began to disintegrate when a Catholic – Paul Martin – was prime minister.

Efforts to recoup losses

Both Liberals and Conservatives have taken note of the shift in Catholic allegiance. Both studies cited above attribute the change to the Liberal sponsorship scandal, which alienated voters in "Catholic Quebec." But others, including many Catholics themselves, blame Liberal support for abortion and same-sex marriage.

The Liberals and their leader Michael Ignatieff are trying to recoup their losses by addressing Catholic voters. But they are also trying to reel in other "religious" voters, both other Christians and those of other faiths. Liberals Justin Trudeau, Andrew Kania and Frank Valeriote are specifically working on that effort. As part of the plan, Ignatieff has held a round-table of religious leaders to discuss issues that concern them.

Liberal John McKay (of Toronto's Scarborough-Guildwood riding) an evangelical Christian is also concerned about his party's loss of Catholic voters and religious voters in general. They made mistakes, he admitted to ipolitics, such as portraying same-sex marriage opponents as unenlightened. (The Liberal government legalized gay marriage in 2005.)

McKay said he suspects that his party also alienated Catholics and other religious groups by painting the Conservatives as religious zealots who cannot be trusted on social issues. "There are times that the Liberal Party has been disagreeable in its disagreements," he acknowledged.

The way back is to convince Catholics that Liberals are still the party that protects the little guy and is strongest on social initiatives such as anti-poverty programs, which the church holds dear, Grenville told Tibbett.

Meanwhile Catholic church leaders are not advising Catholics to vote one way or the other, reports Tibbett. The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops website contains an election guide that urges only "discernment" in deciding who to vote for. Such thoughtfulness should consider candidates' or parties' positions on numerous issues, not just one or two, say the bishops. They cite respect for human life and dignity from conception until natural death, reducing poverty, fighting homelessness and taking action against human trafficking.

Iran: Christian news agency shut down over 'anti-government' reporting

SALMAS, Iran (ICC) – Mohabat News, the only active news agency inside Iran that reported on the recent mass arrests of Christians in the country, was suddenly suspended. The suspension came the day after the agency reported the seizure and burning of 600 New Testaments by authorities in western Iran on February 7, 2011.

The New Testaments were seized during a routine border inspection of a bus in Salmas, western Azerbaijan, during which two boxes, each containing 300 New Testaments, were discovered. The boxes had allegedly been smuggled across the border. No passengers claimed the confiscated boxes. The official website of the Revolutionary Guard accused the United States of playing a role in the incident.

The website of Mohabat News was also immediately disabled. In the past, authorities have been known to shut down websites run by human rights groups and critics of the regime under the guise of defending the nation against "cyber warfare."

In recent months, a staff member of Mohabat News was threatened via an email from the Revolutionary Guard. The email said that he and his family would be targeted, and "bad things" would happen to them as a result of Mohabat's output.

Despite controversy in NYC, pro-life billboards move to Chicago

AUSTIN, Texas, March 29 (CNA) – A pro-life group is continuing their billboard campaign in Chicago after a recent ad was pulled in New York City following complaints.

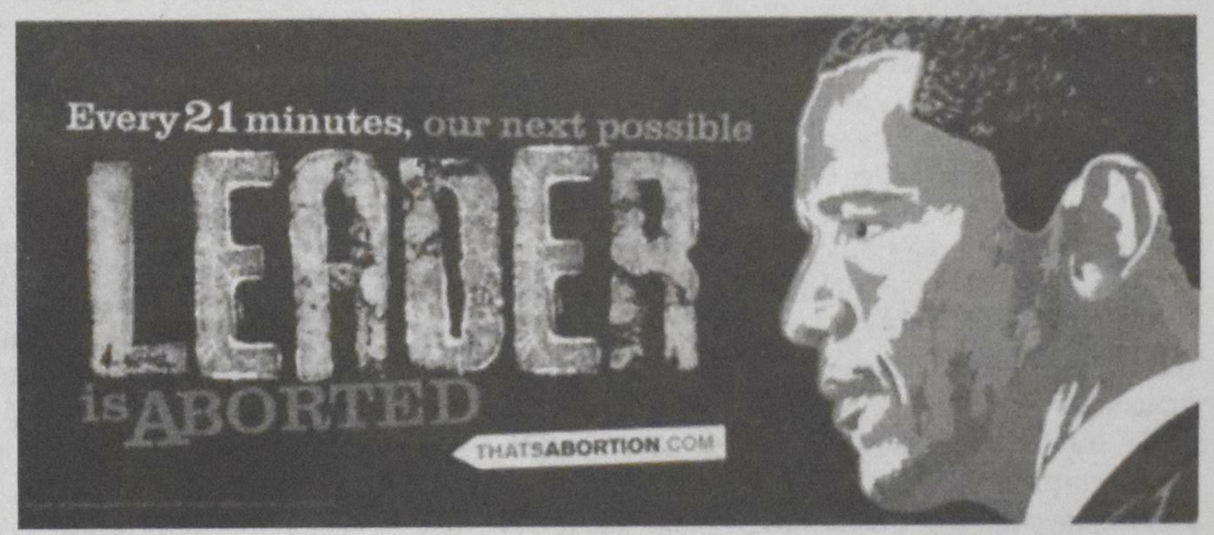
Life Always is the organization behind ads that alluded to the statistic that black babies are aborted at a much higher rate than white (or other non-white) babies in the U.S. African Americans make up just under 13 percent of the population but have abortions at a rate five times higher than whites. Some describe that as effectively self-genocide.

Despite virulent criticism in New York, Life Always has launched a new billboard in Chicago on March 29, featuring an image of U.S. President Obama.

The billboard reads: "Every 21 minutes, our next possible leader is aborted." In the ad, President Obama is shown next to the word "leader," and viewers are also directed to visit **thatsabortion.com**.

"Our hope at Life Always is to call attention to the devastation that abortion is causing in America," Marissa Gabrysch, group spokeswoman, told CNA. "By using a likeness of our President, we hope to draw attention to the fact that our next generation of leaders is in jeopardy because of abortion."

The organization has unveiled 30 billboards on the south side of Chicago – a heavily black area – to draw attention to the disproportionate number of abortions among African Americans in the U.S. Life Always cites U.S. Census data and Center for Disease Control reports which show



that although African Americans comprise less than 13 percent of the population, they account for 36 percent of the entire country's abortions.

Most dangerous place

The plans to launch the Chicago ads followed the removal of the group's prominent billboard in New York City. A 29 feet high and 16 feet wide billboard – unveiled on Feb. 22 and taken down within days – depicted a young black girl beneath the phrase "The most dangerous place for an African American is in the womb."

"The New York billboard generated strong reactions, which was the goal," Gabrysch said. "We all need to react."

Pete Costanza, the general manager for Lamar Advertising, said the billboard was removed because an objector to the billboard harassed the waiters and waitresses in the Mexican restaurant below the sign. The restaurant had no affiliation with the billboard company or the pro-life group.

Dr. Alveda King – niece of civil rights legend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. – told CNA that despite being removed, the New York billboard "opened up dialogue across the country." She said, "I've been able to have many conversations since the billboard went up and came right back down, about how African American women and their children are victims and how we have been targeted by genocide."

In a blog, "The Gospel in the Digital Age," Archbishop Timothy M. Dolan said that the removed ad was so upsetting because its "message is somberly true." Likening the ad to anti-smoking campaigns that show the graphic affects of nicotine addiction, or world hunger organizations that show pictures of starving children, the New York archbishop said that being "confronted by the truth can often be unpleasant."

Columns

Flowers and Thistles

Curt Gesch

Rural scene not rent by rumours of democracy

You can picture the scene in rural Quick, B.C. Melting snow. Pussy willows promising better times after a long, long winter. Canada geese flying overhead. The first bluebird. Farmers are gearing up for calving season. My neighbours are hauling load after load of sawdust, getting ready for the new calves. Motorbikes come out of the shed and whine down the road.

Into the idyllic scene comes a federal election . . . and a pickup truck.

One of our neighbours drives into the yard. We've been friends for years but haven't had a good "sit-down" since the last Christmas party. And now – just about suppertime – he drives in and says, "You know, we haven't had coffee or a good talk for a long time."

"Why not right now?" I ask. That won't work, I'm informed, because he is due home "about 10 minutes ago." And then, after I say, "Anytime, then; I'm always home," I notice a hesitation and then the real reason for the visit comes out: "I noticed your NDP sign in the front yard. I was wondering who would put up an NDP sign on 'our road.' Only Curt. I thought you'd have a sign up for that Christian guy [the Christian Heritage Party candidate]."

Political fault lines

Here's the background to the NDP sign. When we arrived in Surrey, British Columbia in 1974 (population 100,000 at that time), we found ourselves in the middle of a provincial election in which Dave Barrett and his NDP colleagues were demonized in our local Christian school and Christian Reformed Church. We rented a basement suite from a family that openly supported the NDP and worked on its campaign. The husband and father was a Canadian Union of Public Employees local president. His three children were harassed on the bus because their dad was a "commie."

Another endangered species was a school teacher who had grown up in Ontario where small-town Christians often voted liberal. When found out as a provincial Liberal *his* children were harassed on the bus because their dad didn't support the Social Credit, "the Christian political party."

As a young teacher, I noticed that *only* Social Credit buttons appeared on the shirts and jackets of students, even some teachers (most inappropriate during school days, I thought). When asked by some students what the difference really was between the Socreds and NDP, I replied that they seemed to me to have fundamentally different political philosophies but that I didn't know much about either one right now, having just arrived from the U.S.A. However, I continued, Mr. Gerald Vandezande, a Christian political and justice advocate, was speaking in the area and that he would be able to answer their questions much better. In fact, I would give extra credit for students who attended his presentation and made notes and a summary.

Well, on the next Sunday, I found out that the fowl droppings had struck the blades of the oscillating air cooler. Someone had bearded our school board president after church and said that this new teacher, Mr. Gesch, had been advocating for "that socialist," Gerald Vandezande, *in class*. At that point I realized that politics is a religion, at least in some places. And that politics did bring people together, if only to condemn each other.

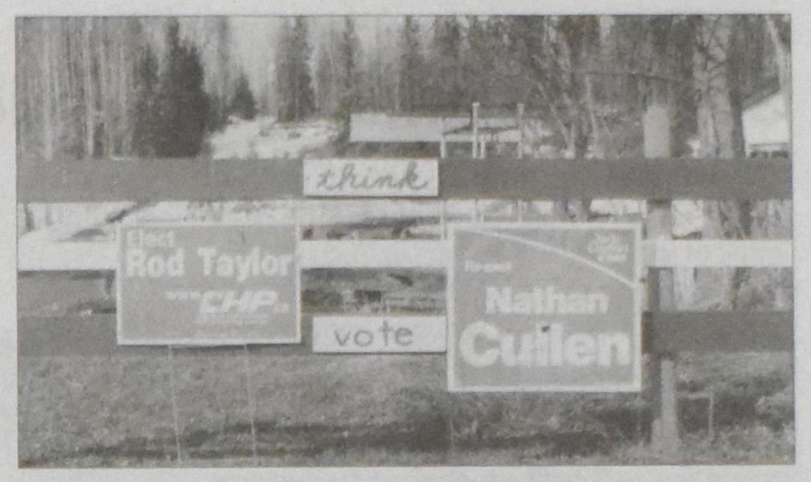
Sign of the times

I'd say things have improved. I live in a much more isolated area of the province now. No longer living in the hotbed of suburban decadence, we have found that local people are much more likely to show any red they have on their necks, but are also much more likely to make a joke or ask a pointed question than to condemn when it comes to politics. Hence, my neighbour's visit and offer to "have a talk."

It began with the decision between my wife, Betsey, and I that this year, for the first time, we would put up a candidate sign on our property. There was not much doubt in our minds which signs we would erect. One would be for our incumbent MP, Nathan Cullen (NDP), and the other for Rod Taylor (CHP). Both are men of integrity and both speak with conviction about certain issues that we feel are vital. Either one would be a good MP. One is called "left-wing" and the other "right-wing" by the media, but those words don't mean much to us. The politics of polarization (including attack ads on TV) sicken us.

We thought that by putting up signs that promote the candidacy of men whose parties are normally considered diametrically opposed we could do our part to insert a little civility into the discussion of those who drive on our little road in Quick.

Betsey and I were both school teachers in the past, so we couldn't resist "making a point" in another way. Beside the election signs we put up two home-made exhortations. One



says, *think* and the other vote.

As one political commentator said the other night, "People all over the world are protesting for the right to vote, being attacked with clubs and guns as they struggle for democracy and freedom, and in Canada fewer than 60 percent of the eligible voters exercise that right."

Our hope is that on Cocks/Morden Road in Quick, B.C., all the eligible voters will listen, think, weigh, consider and vote in the upcoming election. Politics may even bring us together for respectful discussion.

Curt Gesch (curtgesch@hotmail.com) lives in Quick, B.C.

Words from Wild Horses

Kenny Warkentin

The foot of the cross is flat

Who in their right mind would travel 5,000 kilometres for a marriage conference? Or, to put it another way, who would travel that far to the middle of West Texas to attend a marriage conference dealing specifically with the issue of same gender attraction?

This was one question posed to the conference's 160 participants – people who had travelled from across the U.S., Canada and the Philippines.

We did! This was our third year attending the CrossPower Ministries Marriage Conference held in Midland Texas at Stonegate Fellowship. We know full well the impact that this marriage conference has had on our marriage; it's given us many tools for relating to one another as husband and wife. Though this conference is put on for couples where either the husband or wife (or both) struggle with same gender attraction, it also impacts the mentor couples who accompany the participants, as well as the countless volunteers who served us.

The moment you arrive, you are served. You are served by an incredible spirit of love and humility. For those who volunteer from Stonegate, the participants are a symbol of what God can and will do in marriages submitted to him. As the lead pastor of Stonegate Fellowship commented to his congregation on the Sunday following the conference, "Who of you would travel countless miles to attend a conference primarily focused on your struggle? Who would attend a conference dealing with gossip, over-eating, lying, envy, pride or lust?" It was one of those moments you just wanted everything to stop so you could soak in those words. Truly, how many of us point our fingers or made a judgement or value statement about someone else, while we continue to feed our own ways of coping and self-medicating with a substance of choice?

Christ's love comes first

It is humbling to be surrounded by a community that loves those of us who often have felt marginalized by pointing fingers or pointed words regarding the issues of same gender attraction. Many of these people openly express that even in their lives, they too had once humiliated those struggling with same gender attraction, and looked down upon "that issue" rather than be Christ's hands and feet. I have never seen so many tears shed in one place by so many people humbled by the presence of the Lord, who calls us to love unconditionally, to serve, not expecting anything in return and to show kindness that goes beyond our knowledge of a certain issue.

It encouraged us, blessed us and caused us to also ask ourselves, "Who are we serving? Are there people whom we may not understand that Christ is asking us to serve, not expecting anything, but just show love to, regardless?"

Jesus walked on the earth to become a personal God. He came to bind up the broken hearted, set captives free, to look after widows and orphans and to walk alongside the outcast. He modeled that for us and calls us to do the same. He went to the cross to take away our shame, to make us all one with him. Sometimes we think that the ground at the cross is uneven and that some people are more accepted to be at the foot of the cross than others. But Jesus didn't just come for pastors, missionaries, and leaders; we are all called to that place at the foot of the cross. We are all called to be there in solidarity towards one another, not with an air of supremacy over another person, but rather with a knowledge that Christ invited us all there together for us to walk with one another despite our differences and struggles.

We experienced that at this conference. We got to journey with those who have not struggled with same gender issues, but who have faced many other struggles and issues in their lives. Through meeting Christ, they recognize the need to welcome and embrace those they may not understand.

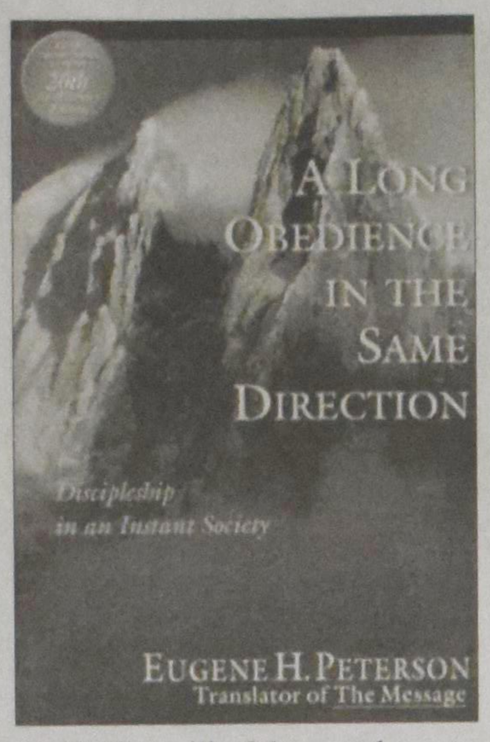
Personally, it again showed me the picture of God the Father who welcomes and embraces all of us through the working of his Son on the cross. Once we begin to taste this love that he has for us, it should only instil a greater hunger within us to show this love to others.

May your lives reflect the love of your heavenly Father, who asks you to receive all that he has for you, so in return you may shower that love on others, especially those you may not fully understand.

Kenny Warkentin (Kenny66@gmail.com) lives in Winnipeg with his wife and daughter and works for Living Waters Canada.

Reviews

Meditation on the Psalms re-imagines obedience in a world of fast faith



Leonard Van Harten

People have always had their problems with Christianity. Our generation is not the first to doubt the incarnation, to dispute the resurrection, or to dismiss "God so loved the world." For centuries, thoughtful people have "heard it said," and have walked away. There will always be people, it seems, who find God's amazing grace ultimately unbelievable, and who, as a result, reject the Christian faith. The rejection of the Gospel truth is lamentable, but it is nothing new.

An issue with perhaps a shorter history would be the fallout generated by the authoritarian style of Christianity. Since the birth of the modern era, many have retreated from Christianity for its stubborn defense of the same old solution. For at least the last few hundred years, it's been too rigid. The will of the people, not to mention the hopes and dreams and needs of the individual, has carried less clout than the will of God. For many, Christianity remains too absolute, too authoritarian. Until Christianity becomes more relevant – that is, more liberal, more democratic – they will keep their distance.

One of the newest problems facing Christianity, I suspect, has little to do with its substance or style. Today, its problem is simply its age. Christianity is just too old. To those bent on moving forward, ready to trumpet what's new, eager to model what's cool or "edgy," Christianity talks funny. The Good News is yesterday's news, and who's interested in stumbling on or dealing in yesterday's news? People don't read, ponder and then reject old news; they just ignore it. Christianity had a history of raising unpleasant questions; now it just raises eyebrows. "I just don't like it, okay?" When we've been there ten thousand years, isn't it high time we moved forward?

I don't know if Eugene Peterson's revised and expanded edition of *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* will help anyone move forward. I'd be more confident stating that here, in this book, Peterson is encouraging would-be disciples to step back. It would seem that the step back is the first step toward God.

"It is not difficult in such a world to get a person interested in the message of the gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest." (16)

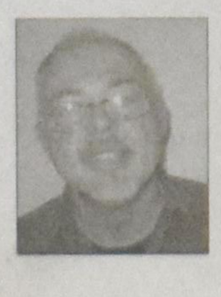
Peterson first wrote this book way back in 1980. Its title includes the risky words "long" and "same." For many, the title will forecast the boredom that they are bound to experience beyond the front cover, and this will be sufficient cause for them to step away or to at least keep their distance. Most of us don't like anything to be long unless it's our vacation. As for "same," apart from toothbrushes and the amount of cream and sugar in our coffee, who likes anything to be the same? But let's assume you could get past the subject of the book, the words "long" and "same," the year of publication and the matter of the ancient sources (albeit in the language of *The Message*) upon which Peterson's reflections are based. Are the pages between the front and back covers worth reading? Should you take the next step forward and read this book on discipleship?

You'll need to be in the mood – a repentant mood – because this book is less than therapeutic and far from fashionable. Feelings "are important for many things…they keep me aware of much that is true and real. But they tell me next to nothing about God or my relation to God. My security comes from who God is, not from how I feel" (87). Peterson believes that we need more than our own experience to live maturely as the people of God in the real world. In addition to the experiences of our brothers and sisters in the church, we need the centuries of experience provided by our biblical ancestors. "A Christian who has David in his bones, Jeremiah in his bloodstream, Paul in his fingertips and Christ in his heart will know how much and how little value to put on his momentary feelings and the experience of the past week" (167). Like it or not, the people of God "tramp well-worn paths" (166).

Unlike some other books on Christian spirituality, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* offers no short-cuts to Christian discipleship. In this book, Peterson leads his readers on a slow, uplifting walk through the Psalms known as the Songs of Ascents. Peterson writes, "There is no literature that is more true to life and more honest than the Psalms . . . the Psalms are great poetry and have lasted not because they appeal to our fantasies and our wishes but because they are confirmed in the intensities of honest and hazardous living" (75).

Peterson's meditations on each of the fifteen Songs of Ascents bear the fruit of his prayerful reading. Those on the Way who read *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* will appreciate his wisdom and guidance. They will be startled by Peterson's deep insights, steadied by his perspectives and maybe even moved again by God's grace.

A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society
by Eugene Peterson.
Downer's Grove, IL:
Intervarsity Press, 2000.



Leonard Van Harten (lelaser@hotmail.com) is pleased to see three of his former students writing for the Christian Courier.

Time-worn catechism sees surprising comeback

Tom Deelstra

Why has the Heidelberg Catechism been called outdated and irrelevant? Why does there seem to be a growing movement to remove catechism instruction from youth (and adult) education? Is the catechism out of touch? Is teaching the catechism something that should be dropped by the church? In *The Good News We Almost Forgot*, author Kevin DeYoung answers these latter concerns in the negative, asserting that the most important theological task of the church today is not to reinvent or to be relevant, but to remember. As DeYoung says, "The only thing more difficult than finding the truth is not losing it" (13). This engaging, spiritually refreshing commentary on a very relevant 16th century text is Kevin DeYoung's effort to ensure that the Heidelberg Catechism is not forgotten.

Kevin DeYoung is the senior pastor of University Reformed Church in East Lansing, a college campus community church situated near Michigan State University. He is probably best known for being a conservative, Reformed voice amongst the sea of emergent thinkers making headlines today. He has co-authored a book that has defended the institutional church, *In Praise of Organized Religion*, and a book that critically examines the emergent church movement, *Why We're Not Emergent, by Two Guys Who Should Be*. This book, *The Good News We Almost Forgot* is of much different origins than his previous work. Believing in the message of the Heidelberg Catechism, DeYoung decided to write weekly devotions on the Catechism for the members of his church. Despite having initial fears as to whether this laborious process would bear fruit, DeYoung found that as the weeks went on, members brought binders to church to collect the newest devotional. *The Good News* is the result of DeYoung's enormous undertaking and the content of the book shows that his labour was not in vain.

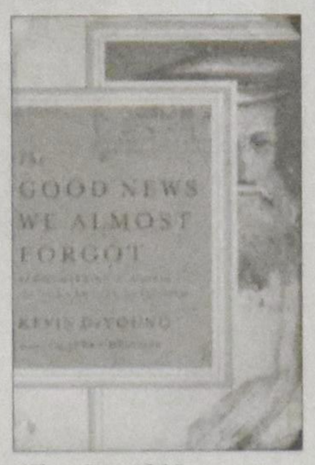
"The chief theological task now facing the Western church is not to reinvent or to be relevant but to remember." (13)

Theologian Zacharias Ursinius wrote the Heidelberg Catechism in 1534 for Elector Frederick III, ruler of Palatinate, a princely state of the Holy Roman Empire. The Catechism was to be a tool for teaching children, a guide for preachers, and a form of confessional unity amongst the Protestant factions in the Palatinate.

Divided into three sections, commonly called guilt, grace and gratitude, the Catechism's structure follows the pattern of salvation laid out in the book of Romans. Ursinius divided the Catechism into 52 Lord's Days, allowing pastors to preach on one Lord's Day per year, while also providing families with one devotional per week. In his introduction, De Young shares why he felt compelled to write on the Heidelberg Catechism: "In a church age confused about the essential elements of the Christian faith . . . the Heidelberg catechism offers a relentless reminder of the one doctrine that matters most: We are great sinners and Christ is a great Saviour" (18).

For each Lord's Day, DeYoung offers a short, three to four page devotional. The meditations contain pastoral explanations, teachings and practical applications. DeYoung offers a fresh and insightful take that beautifully illustrates the gospel truths found in the Heidelberg Catechism.

With each devotional, DeYoung offers sound biblical teaching that makes the words of the Catechism come alive. He does so with a style that is straightforward, engaging and entirely readable. *The Good News We Almost Forgot* is a difficult book in which to find fault. The book preaches God's grace and salvation. It was a book written so that readers may see the beautiful, gospel truths found in the Heidelberg text. It is a message that touches both our understanding (head) and our emotions (heart). As DeYoung says in his epilogue, "this has been a book about theology, about knowing theology and loving theology. But if we've really paid attention to the Heidelberg Catechism, this should also be a book about warmhearted, experiential faith." (241) I concur, and urge those looking for deeper faith, more knowledge on Reformed thought, or a better appreciation for the Heidelberg Catechism, to read this book.



The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16th Century Catechism.
Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2010.

Tom Deelstra (tomdeel@hotmail.com) resides in Ancaster, Ontario with his wife and daughter. He is finishing up his Bachelor of Education at Redeemer University College.

Features

The Entombment *by Benvenuto Tisi (Il Garofalo).*

Buried with him in his death

We fought for one more sputter
of the old life. Even though a breeze passing
over your sieve of skin could send you
screaming, you muscled up your diaphragm
to whisk more air into the fire.

I held my own terrors to my chest:
failures and brush-offs, cancers and crashes,
all the anxieties I had grown to love
heaving and cracking like your ribcage
until we both gave out.

Then there was the mess of prying us loose:
wailing women and splintered lumber,
flesh stubbornly sticking to the nails.
But what swift hands, that Joseph of Arimathea,
what purposeful footsteps crunching the ground!

He wrapped us in linen and spices.
Only the hapless world could think of packing
fifty pounds of aloe around a dead man's wounds.
But we drank it in like deserts
until finally even the lizards scurried home.

I lay in the cave and wanted to touch you,
but my hands were no longer mine.
They closed in on themselves like daylilies.
The stone rumbled over the window of light,
and then our difficult rising began.

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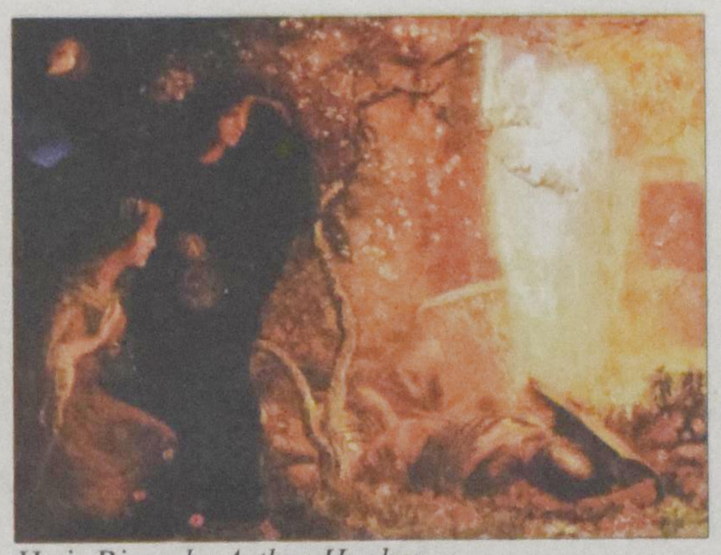
MARIANNE VANDERSPEK



He is Risen *by Arthur Hughes.*

No one can boast

On the tollway just south of Kenosha
spring sets the boarded-up porn store ablaze,
topaz dousing the peeling paint,
the harp-notes of ice on the gutters.
On the embankment home geese gather
in the mud-slush. Tractors lift their beams
to the rising temple of a new overpass.

I outlasted winter, four months rumpled
under snow. On Christmas we woke
to a broken furnace, the baby's fingers
carrot-stick cold. One night I skidded
off the patio steps. Most mornings I stared
out the window, wondering how far
I'd driven my life in the ground,
asking the darkness how much longer.

I kill the radio. Just the hum of the motor,
the pitted road, my slow, steady breath
like the syllables *Yah, weh.* I didn't work
at this joy. It just appeared in the splash
and shine of I-94, as suddenly as these Frisbees
and sand buckets in the roadside yards
laid bare by the shrinking snow.

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Jairus' Daughter *by Ilja Repin.*

Jairus' daughter

The girl is not dead
but asleep.

See her blanket breathe?
See the new sweat
shiver on her brow?

Watch. Her lips have parted
to take in the blue air
of mourners' flutes.

Her eyes are flickering.
She is reaching
for his hand.

Because of her,
your hope will be stirred.

You will look for snowdrops
in the frost.

You will watch the roadside
body of a deer
and wait for an ear to flutter.

You will close the casket
and linger in the parlor,
listening for a knock.

Reprinted from *The Mennonite* with permission.

Poet Profile: *Tania Runyan's first full-length collection of poetry,* Simple Weight, *was published by FutureCycle Press in 2010. Wordfarm will release her second collection,* A Thousand Vessels, *in 2011. Tania says writing about scripture affords her the opportunity to truly meditate upon – and grapple with – God's word. Poetry is a way, in the words of Luke, "to speak about what she has seen and heard" in the most personal sense. When not writing, Tania spends her days tutoring high school students, playing Irish fiddle and mandolin, gardening, and chasing three kids around the house.*

Features

Early in the morning

Celebrating the road to Resurrection Sunday

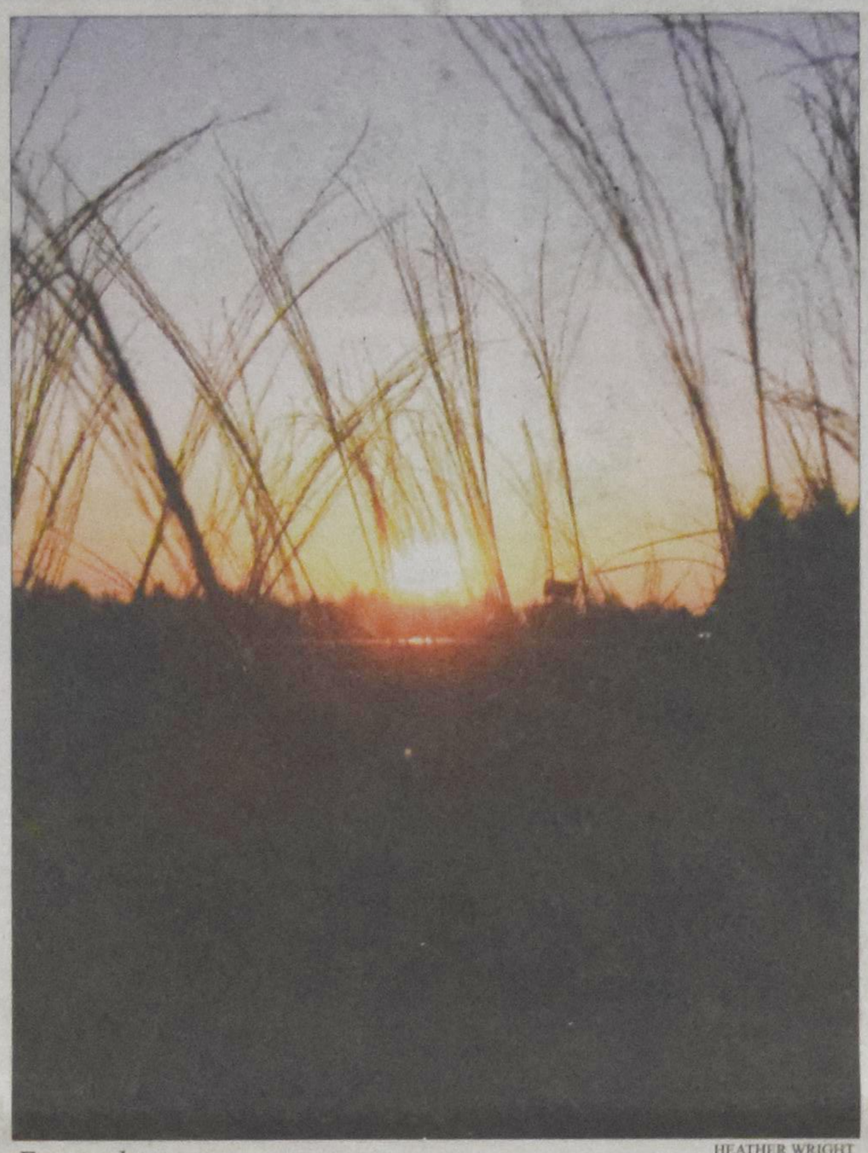
On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. Luke 24:1

Heather Wright

I remember the first time I rose early in the morning like "the women" in the resurrection story. It was about 5:30 am in 1995 – very early indeed. I was going to my church's Easter Sunrise Service. Not knowing what to expect, I dutifully rose, showered, dressed in my Sunday best and headed out the door. Easter was early that year. Five centimetres of cold wet snow lay on the ground at the home where the service was held. Little blades of grass peeked through the white carpet around my high heels as I stood under the giant pine trees shivering. Friends around me, dressed more sensibly for the coolness of the early morning, greeted each other. We waited for the moment the sun would break the horizon of the farm field in the distance.

The pastor read the familiar story and as the first rays of the sun shone, we began to sing: *Alive, alive, alive forevermore. My Jesus is alive, alive forevermore.* It was a less than enthusiastic version, but considering the frozen lips, it wasn't too bad. It was one of those times when it is good to remember all praise is made perfect in the sight of God because of the Risen Lord. By the time we had reached the end of the 10 minute service, the strains of *He has risen from the dead and He is Lord* were a little stronger, a little louder. Maybe we were buoyed by the thought of a hot pot of coffee and breakfast inside. It was the cold beginning of one of my new favourite ways to mark the resurrection.

Every church celebrates Easter. The organ soars, trumpets ring and choirs sing. The heady fragrance of lilies fills sanctuaries around the world. We are reminded again of the glory which met the women at the tomb. For many churches, Resurrection Sunday is the culmination of reflection about the road to Calvary as well as a celebration of the empty tomb. Some congregations begin preparing during Lent, marking the weeks leading up to Jesus' death and resurrection.



Easter dawns. HEATHER WRIGHT

At Rev. Jim Breen's church, Hope United Church in Alvinston, Ontario, the holiest of Christian celebrations comes into focus on the Thursday before Easter with a Seder meal. The church re-enacts Jesus' Last Supper, a Passover meal with his disciples. Breen says it begins in the sanctuary of the rural church where members of the congregation read the gospel accounts of the Last Supper. Then they move to the "banquet table" which has been prepared with the traditional Passover meal – including the bitter herbs of Jewish tradition which stand for the tears of the enslaved Israelites in Egypt. "It becomes a metaphor for us Christians who are enslaved by sin and freed by Christ's sacrifice," he says. Breen explains that the Seder meal connects the story of salvation. "All the metaphors come alive when you physically do it," says Breen. "It connects the Old and the New Testament and the coming of the new kingdom in powerful ways." For Breen, it sets the mood for Good Friday and gives the "whole story more context." Good Friday is a time for witness to the community. Breen's church holds a "*Way of the Cross* Walk." Church members walk through Alvinston bearing the cross, just as Christ carried his cross to his death.

Bringing Golgotha to Ontario

It's one of many such memorials in southwestern Ontario. In Mt. Brydges, just a half hour from Breen's church, the walk is an ecumenical event where Christians proceed from church to church, listening to songs and a short message at four community churches. Phil Apoll is the pastor of the Christian Reformed Church in Mt. Brydges. He's taken part in the walk ever since his arrival in the community. Apoll says he likes to gather with other churches to mark the sacrifice of Christ. "There is something nice about walking down the street together," he says. "By the time you're done, there can sometimes be up to 200 people." Apoll says the community has been marking Good Friday this way for about 15 years. At first, it was seen as a bit unusual, but now community members have come to expect the annual trek as a visual display of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Visual aids play a large role on Good Friday. At The Story, a Free Methodist Church plant in Sarnia, Ontario, Pastor Joe Manafo relies heavily on visuals to connect with the people who walk through his doors. Good Friday is no different. In 2010, Manafo constructed a barbed wire crown, depicting Christ's crown of thorns, which hung from the ceiling. He placed red ice on it, which dripped like blood as the people were coming to the table for communion. It was a powerful visual reminder of what was suffered for them. Manafo says that, while some churches end Good Friday with the uplifting reminder that Easter is coming, he wants people to "explore the gravity of Good Friday. We shouldn't skirt the Good Friday pain," says Manafo. "We should recognize it ... and put ourselves in the disciples' place. That way, Christians can also put themselves in the place – feel the joy – of 'the women.'"

Casual but faithful worship on Easter morning. HEATHER WRIGHT

Resurrection Sunday at The Story is a party – literally. Children are given instruments and can play whenever and however they like as the people seated in the large u-shape created by used couches sing praise songs and hear the Good News. And they celebrate Communion. Manafo says they eat only half the meal on Good Friday – just the bread. Then on Sunday "we have the wine [because] it is a party!" Afterwards, they share a meal and celebrate some more.

Greeting the Son

The celebration starts early at the Easter Sunrise Service in Dresden, my home church. The lights of cars streaming down back roads in the pre-dawn darkness carry the faithful to await the sunrise of Resurrection Sunday. There are seniors and singles, families with teenagers and young parents with toddlers in pyjamas. They're happy to be there, even at the crack of dawn. "The fact that people gather out of their own volition makes it different," says CRC pastor Richard VanderVaart. "On Sunday morning, you watch people roll in and it is like they have to be there. But people want to be here [at the Sunrise Service]. They're here with enthusiasm."

The service is informal with everyone standing in a circle. Sometimes the biblical account of the resurrection is read; other times it's acted out. Sometimes there is a poetry reading. There are always songs rising to the heavens in the cool morning air. The easy atmosphere makes it an inviting service for people from the church to bring their unchurched acquaintances. "People feel free to invite friends," says VanderVaart. "Because it is less formal, I feel welcome to bring my neighbours."

Afterwards, the members of the church and their friends celebrate a potluck breakfast together. The home is usually packed wall-to-wall with happy people. Last year, the breakfast was held in a drive shed to accommodate everyone. When the meal is done, the people head home, put on their new spring Sunday best outfits and come to the regular service to hear again the story of the women and the tomb and the angels' proclamation: *He has risen!*

Heather Wright is a reporter for Sarnia This Week. She and her family attend Dresden CRC.

Maranatha

Does the heat of our desire
blush green
(memoried in roots)
to the surface of our eyes?

Might the press of our impatience
stir green,
still in seed,
to quiet our restlessness?

How do leaves shivered from trees
shade again?

Whose warmth, whose passing
saps the stone, bone and bitter cold,
sweetens winter into spring?

Ah, Jesus, come springly.
Turn merciful white
into endless holy, holy
holy green.

Leonard Van Harten (lelaser@hotmail.com) lives in Thorndale, Ontario.

Features

A slow walk

Morris Greidanus

The eerie sound of muffled drums and soft footsteps in unison came down our street in Amsterdam on a bright day, shortly after World War II had ended. As eight-year-old boys, my neighbourhood friend and I were drawn along by this sombre procession. A draped coffin was surrounded by soldiers marching solemnly. Some civilians in Sunday clothes walked near the coffin with heads bowed. The drums led the group, sounding a quiet beat every eight or ten steps. We followed this slow march of the dead along the Admiraal de Ruyterweg and stayed with it as it turned onto the Haarlemmerweg at the edge of the city. The procession reached a cemetery, but we did not follow through the gates – that looked too scary. We did our own slow walk back home. As we walked, I tried to tell my public school friend about the resurrection, but it sounded so strange to him that I gave up.

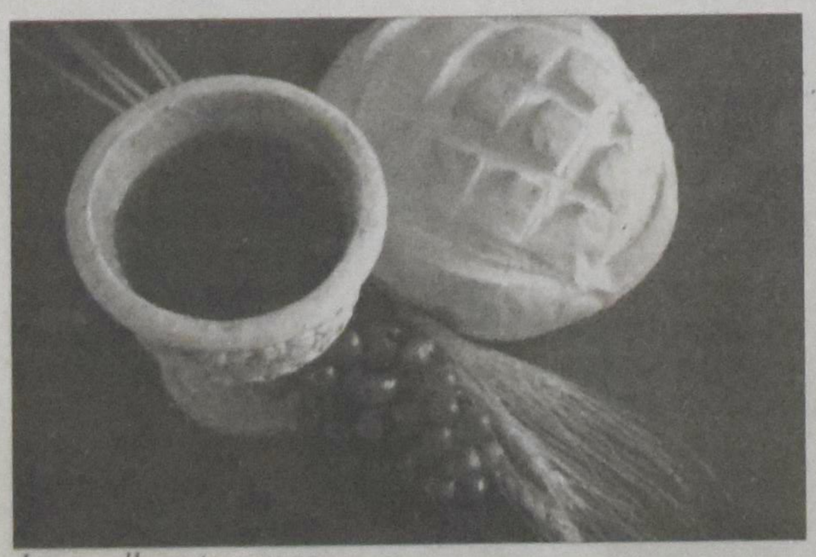
Landscape with Christ and his Disciples on the Road to Emmaus *by Jan Wildens, 1640s.*

Do you find it easy to talk to your family, friends or co-workers about Easter this year, when the news spews images and messages about wars, uprisings, recession, earthquakes, tsunamis and nuclear power plants gone wild? Our earth is exploding – how can mere words about an event long ago take away the pain and anxiety?

I find Luke's account of the slow walk to Emmaus helpful. We sense that Cleopas and his friend are feeling down and worn-out by the weekend's stunning events as they walk back to Emmaus. Their world has imploded. Hope for the nation's restored life of *shalom* is shattered; their gutsy teacher and prophet is dead – and rumours of his reappearance have upset them, raising hope and dashing it again.

They talk it over sadly as they walk home – until the stranger joins them, a stranger who seems unmoved by the events that have shaken Jerusalem. In fact, the stranger takes them on a trip through the prophets and gradually convinces them that salvation and suffering, dying and rising were part of God's promised salvation from its very first hints. Perhaps they discuss the Genesis warning to the serpent about the bruised heel, or Isaiah's song of the suffering servant. As they consider the prophets through the stranger's eyes, the cold feeling around their hearts begins to thaw.

Hospitably they insist that the stranger join them for the evening meal and for the night, only to discover that they do more than "entertain angels unawares." For, as they eat and drink their simple meal together, the one who had turned a Passover meal into the supper of his presence opens their eyes with this new interpretation of their Easter weekend. They rush seven miles back to Jerusalem to share their story with the other disciples. But, before Cleopas and his friend can say a word about their Emmaus discovery, the disciples greet them with the glad shout: "The Lord is risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon." They respond by telling about their meeting with Jesus on the road and at the meal. Suddenly, the risen Lord himself is in the room and greets them with his peace.



Jesus calls us to supper.

Beyond eyewitness evidence

How much more Easter evidence could one ask for? Cleopas and his companion have walked and talked with Jesus; Peter has seen the risen Jesus; and now their familiar rabbi greets them with his blessing. One would think this is enough evidence of the Resurrection, leaving no room for doubt!

However, we read two surprising reactions: "They were startled and terrified," and "in their joy they were still disbelieving and wondering." Their curious behaviour puzzled me at first (What are they waiting for? What more do they need?), and then it brought comfort. Even these eyewitnesses, who have walked and talked with Jesus and who have seen the risen Lord with their own eyes, have a hard time fitting this stunning event into their everyday world. So let's not get down on the gospel or on ourselves if we find it hard to see and tell the comfort and hope of Easter in this groaning, creaking, 2011 world of ours. It has always taken faith to see the risen Lord; faith was required at the first Easter, and faith is still required today.

Like a teacher whose students are not catching on, Jesus seems disappointed and a little annoyed with the disciples. He reminds them, in a replay of the Emmaus road lesson, that it takes faith – long, patient, well-informed faith – to catch on to Easter.

Then Jesus sends his followers on a global mission with good news for the nations. This good news includes his suffering, death and resurrection and our repentance and forgiveness. The gospel is not a simple story that ignores the suffering, sin and pain in today's world. God has never been unaware of the suffering of the world, nor is he unmoved by our pain. He is amazingly patient with his creatures and loves them deeply. Perhaps Jesus reminded Cleopas of the Creator's tender words to the prophet Jonah about his target city: "And should I not be concerned about Nineveh, that great city, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons who do not know their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

God's great and patient love is the reason that those who already believe do not get instant Easter – never mind those still sitting on the fence. God takes his own slow, merciful walk through history. He is eager to heal and save many more.

As we wait for the fullness of Easter to break through death and pain, we know that Jesus suffered for us and suffers with us. Like Cleopas, we may live in these times with a well-based hope that death, sin and destruction will not have the last word. When we take the long view, the one that Jesus teaches, we may sing, "Death no longer/ Is the stronger /Hell itself is captive led," and these triumphant words will not clash with the realities of our daily lives and news.

Walking our own Emmaus road

We do have to make a choice, though, at Easter, and every day.

Do we focus on our fears, wanting to see change right away, settling for despair if it doesn't come in the time frame we expect? Then we are doing the slow walk, deaf to the stranger's words and unaware of his divine presence.

Or do we believe what Jesus said and did, and do we allow God to save us and our world in his patient way? When Easter-faith falters, why don't we do what Cleopas did? Take a slow, Jesus-guided walk through the prophets. For a sample of what the disciples learned, read Peter's sermon on Pentecost. Then sit down with Jesus at that meal he gave his church. Hear him say, "This is my body broken for you" and take the faith-filled step of taking, eating and believing. Fred Craddock notes in *Luke* that "Luke here tells us that the living Christ is both the key to our understanding of the Scriptures and the very present Lord who is revealed to us in the breaking of the bread. His presence at the table makes all believers first-generation Christians and every meeting place Emmaus."

Having walked, talked and eaten a meal with Jesus ourselves, we may count on the Spirit to warm up our doubting hearts and open our dim eyes. Then we too may speak and sing of our joy-filled hope in the powerful love of our God and Savior who suffered, died and rose! We join Cleopas and the disciples in Jerusalem, and the global church now, in the glad greeting: **"He is risen indeed!"**

Morris Greidanus is a retired pastor living in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Columns

From the 11th Province

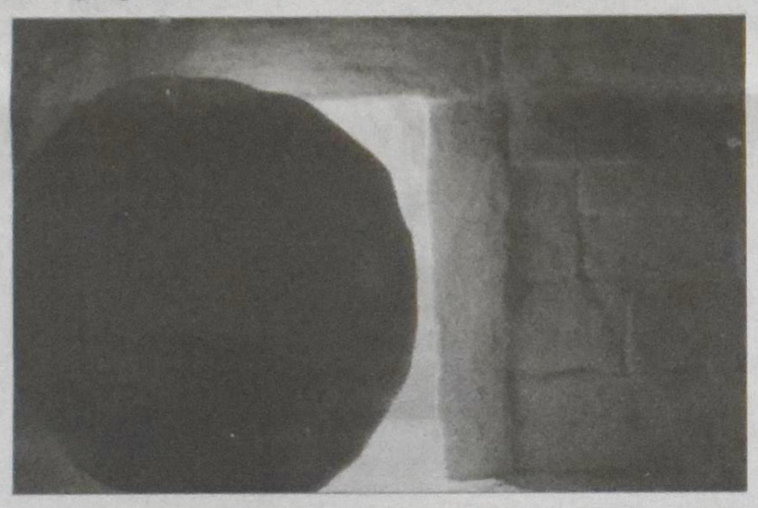
Marian Van Til

'We shall be like him'

How often do you think about the resurrection of the dead? If you go to a church where the Nicene or Apostles' Creed is recited each Sunday then you weekly confess, "I believe in the resurrection of the body." Of course Easter Sunday is the occasion *extraordinaire* for acknowledging that "Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20). So on that Happy Morning we greet each other with "Christ is risen, he is risen indeed!"

Saying that Christ arose and therefore we will too is far more than positing intellectual doctrine. It's the linchpin of our faith. "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith," says Paul (1 Cor. 15:14). A little later he pointedly tells us just how useless: "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die'" (1 Cor. 15:32, quoting Isa. 22:13). I may as well do whatever my unregenerate heart desires if when I die I merely slip into nothingness. Then, despite my self-worshipping decadence, I need fear no judgment by a righteous God. Then life is a game, and death is merely "game over."

If you believe Christ arose you must believe you will too. There is a straight-line connection between the two. Christ as the "firstfruits" of all who have died is the first and best of the eventual exquisite crop of gloriously re-embodied, re-breathed human beings he died to save.



> If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.
> (1 Cor. 15:14)

We know that. Yet we talk mostly of heaven, usually compelled by the funerals of loved ones. We focus on being with Christ in the spiritual realm after we have shucked these worn out, diseased or injured bodies. But the New Earth, not heaven, is our ultimate home.

Perhaps the New Earth just isn't part of any reality we can comprehend. It's vastly remote; do we live as if we really believe that Christ could return "in the twinkling of an eye"? The end-of-time resurrection and our subsequent life with God on the renewed earth is so fantastic that it's beyond envisioning without the Spirit's help. Paul says, again quoting Isaiah (64:4), "What no eye has seen, what no ear has heard, and what no human mind has conceived – the things God has prepared for those who love him – these are the things God has revealed to us by his Spirit." Paul, in fact, asserts that if the "rulers of this age" had understood this mystery they "would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

'We shall see him as he is'

Looking at Christ risen gives some clues as to what our own resurrected bodies will be like. His glorified body remained human, but free of the ravages of sin. He was recognizable by all who knew him; he showed his disciples evidence of his crucifixion scars. He ate (though each time in the context of fellowship and surely not out of hunger. Hunger – but certainly not the enjoyment of food – is, I think, a consequence of the Fall). He did not drink wine, however. Jesus told his disciples he would not drink again of the fruit of the vine *until* he comes in his Kingdom. One implication is: what a feast *that* will be! And we will share it!

His body could defy matter in a way our fallen bodies can't. He could pass through walls and could appear and disappear. Our resurrected bodies will have a different relationship to matter than we do now. It is not so perplexing, then, to confess with the historic church that Christ ascended bodily to heaven and sits at the right hand of God until his second coming, though heaven is a place of the spirit.

Being God incarnate, Christ could have appropriated some of those qualities during his earthly life. But then he would not have "been like us in all things, sin excepted." And his being like us in all things is our great comfort and joy in this world of woe. Yet even greater will be *our* being like *him,* risen and glorified ("Those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified" Romans 8:30).

The Apostle John gets the last word on this subject: "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2).

Marian Van Til (mvantil@roadrunner.com) is a former CC editor living in Youngstown, N.Y.

Let every man and woman count himself immortal. Let him catch the revelation of Jesus in his resurrection. Let him say not merely, "Christ is risen," but "I shall rise."

Phillips Brooks

The great gift of Easter is hope – Christian hope which makes us have that confidence in God, in his ultimate triumph, and in his goodness and love, which nothing can shake.

Basil C. Hume

Artful Eye

Supper at Emmaus, *1606, by Michelangelo Caravaggio.*

Eden, Emmaus Optics

EVE
We walked with our God today:
Eat not, he said, of that tree's fruit.
Knowledge of good and evil weighs heavy–
You will die at Fear's hands.
Choose life and love your Creator.

We walked with the Liar today:
Take and eat, he said, of that tree's fruit.
Filtering good from evil brings answers –
You will thrive on polarization.
Choose knowledge and be like your Creator.

We did not walk with God today:
With Adam, I ate to remove the hues of mystery.
Our eyes were opened to a world achromatic
And we, the naked half,
The portion damned by the scheme we had chosen,
We knew
Fear.

The curse commenced its life-shriveling hold.
In the cool of the day we hid.

DAY OF THE LORD
And for three hours, Fear absorbed all light
As Love bore the curse and died.

EVE (reprise)
We walked with our God today:
Garden bower has withered to a dusty path between towns,
"Cool of the day" recalls a sour fable of regret.
Person-blind, we continued to reason
As self-distraction from fear,
Systematists confounded by the day's events,
Weary of the fruit we'd been eating since Eden.
Until

The tree of life broke bread at our table
Take and eat, he said, of my body broken for you.
Our eyes were opened.
We knew
Him.

Fear fled
And Love re-bent light into a many-colored bow.

Jessica Groen (jessgroen@yahoo.com) lives in Hammond, Indiana with her husband, Jeff and pre-school son, Douwe, and is occupied with tending their household.

Columns

Everyday Christian

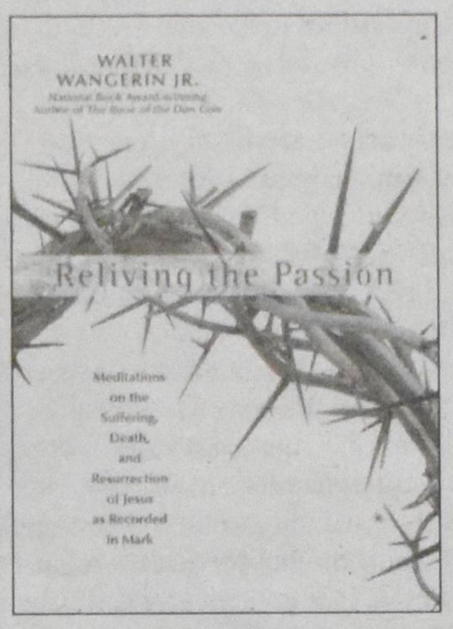
Cathy Smith

Unfair trade practices

My friend sighed: "I wish I could loose myself from the world these last few days leading up to Easter, but there are always distractions, temptations and failures to sit with Jesus. His disciples in the garden were weak. I, too, am prone to sleep and betrayal."

I respect her desire for meditation. But I wonder if "sitting with Jesus" doesn't happen equally well on the run. Maybe passing out hotdogs at the church-sponsored BBQ or chatting with a friend who needs encouragement is simply prayer on legs. I engage in mobile prayer daily, in the shower and doing dishes, as often as concerns and people cross my mind. John Bunyan said, "He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him the rest of the day." I don't agree. Multi-tasking prayers don't feel like short-changing God to me; they feel like sacred exercise drills, repeatedly placing the 18,400 seconds of the day's minutiae and chores in his hands. If my scheduled devotions occasionally fall by the wayside, I don't see that as betrayal. I've been conversing with God all day! His companionship hallows all my human "running." I'm not holier praying than I am scrubbing my tub. Zechariah's "holy cooking pots and harness bells," Peter's "holy bodies" and Paul's "holy nation," lead me in faith to claim all my materiality and moments as holy.

I agree with my friend, though, that devotions are an important channel for the Word and Spirit to nourish my spirituality. The best Lenten devotional I've ever used was Walter Wangerin's *Reliving the Passion*. Wangerin clued me in to the costliness of the exchange that brought "holy" to my everyday life: "Maybe none shall see with more terrible clarity the sorrow of our Lord than the apostle Paul: 'For our sake,' he writes, 'God made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God' (2 Cor. 5:21). He does not write: 'To bear our guilt,' as though a good man became better by substituting himself for our punishment. Severely, Paul writes, 'God made him to be sin.' Jesus has become a bad man, the worst of all men, the badness, in fact, of all men and all women together. Paul does not write, 'To bear our sin,' as though Jesus and sin are essentially separate things, the one a weight upon the other for a while.


WALTER
WANGERIN JR.
Reliving the Passion
Meditations on the Suffering, Death, and Resurrection of Jesus as Recorded in Mark

No, but 'to be sin': Jesus is sin! Jesus is the thing itself!"

The purchase price

Wangerin explains how Jesus cannot be comforted even by an underlying sense of his own innocence. "Holy, he hates sin. Holy, he now hates himself. . . . A sorrow unlike any other sorrow in the universe." And then the worst: "Between the Father and the Son now exists a gulf of impassable width and substance. It is the divorce of despising. For, though the Son still loves the Father obediently and completely, the Father despises the Son completely because he sees in him the sum of human disobedience, the sum of it from the beginning of time to the end of time. He hates the Son, even unto damning him."

I, too, was guilty of sanitizing and thus diminishing the Atonement. Now I can't. Imagine Jesus mutating before your eyes: "becoming" every loathsome thought, every horrific deed you've ever read about in disbelieving revulsion. Imagine the Perfect One "becoming" the torturer, the betrayer, the pedophile, the murderer. This is so far beyond the physical sacrifice of his body that human comprehension pales before it. He sacrificed his very selfhood. He stood outside his Father's love.

God's trade practices are not fair. Heaven and earth quake at such a preposterous bargain. The Beloved One bartered to the unholy so my world can be holy and beloved. So I can be holy and beloved. So we who are Christian can join in with the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Driving the kids to school: "Gloria!" Making chili for supper: "Gloria!" Taking the car in for an oil change: "Gloria!" 18,400 times a day: "Gloria!"

Cathy Smith (cathy@christiancourier.ca) is features editor with CC. *She lives in Wyoming, Ontario.*

Getting Unstuck

Arlene Van Hove

My personal Camino

For years I have wanted to walk the famous pilgrimage called the Santiago de Compostela Camino across northern Spain. It's an ancient journey covering nearly 500 miles across highways, mountains and valleys, as well as cities, towns and fields. And like early pilgrims, my hope was to experience some psycho-spiritual understanding in terms of my contemporary life.

But, no longer.

Now, the Camino would pale in comparison to the pilgrimage I am walking in my own backyard – alongside my mother as she experiences the ravages of aging and needs consistent care, comfort and compassion. And like early pilgrims walking the Camino, I know this experience will give me psycho-spiritual insights into my chosen life.

What strengths remain

By now my regular readers know my mother, at 92, has become a special needs person. She cannot see, cannot walk, cannot adapt easily due to short-term memory loss and suffers from dementia. And yet, most times when I come in the afternoon and ask her how she is doing, she will say 'good.' She answers this way because she retrieves this out of her long-term memory file. I appreciate this gift because she unwittingly encourages me not to focus on the things she cannot do but on what strengths remain.

Most parents do not want to become dependent on their children but it happens when they are facing the challenges of late aging and have no other choice. And so, when my mother became more and more fragile in the fall of 2006, I decided to help look after her so that she could have some quality of life. Now I'm entering my fifth year of being one of her caregivers. The first two and a half years were spent in her apartment and the second two and a half years in a facility where I spend five afternoons a week caring for my mother.

Arrived?

"It's been some journey," I told a good friend recently. "But I finally arrived."

"Arrived?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"From where?" she questioned.

"It's hard to explain," I said.

"Try," she suggested.

And so I told her about my personal Camino. I told her I had great role models in my husband's family. My brother-in-law and his wife raised a special needs daughter for 20 years. Their lives were very different from mine. I had choices that were not open to them. They accepted what life offered them.

My mother, a widow since 1987, suffered her first stroke more than 10 years ago. As the years rolled by she became more fragile and needed more care. And so, I put into practice what I learned from my role models and accepted what life offered me.

I began streamlining my responsibilities in ways that allow me to care for my mother. I felt fortunate my ego was pliable, my family baggage was light (because of my training as therapist), and my spouse became my sheltering spirit. In a nutshell, I accepted this stage in my life and helped look after my mother so that she could experience some quality of life like the rest of the family.

Part of Santiago de Compostela Camino pilgrimage route in Notthern Spain.

"Yes, but you said you arrived," she reminded me.

"Watching my mother suffer has been the most difficult part of the journey," I told her. "I was particularly devastated when my mother could no longer walk, could no longer see and she had to be admitted to a facility. But it also tossed me into another stage of psycho-spiritual development. After each devastation, I decided to see my mother as a teacher from whom I could learn. And so, my journey with my mother was a catalyst in helping me develop patience, acceptance, compassion, love and a relative amount of peace."

Am I happier than before? Not necessarily, but I gained a better understanding of how the world and the people in it function and how God may or may not be evident in some life experiences. I also have a fuller appreciation for my life, which allows me to give more to others in return. And in regards to being tossed into another stage of development, I am reminded of Richard Rohr, author of *The Naked Now: Learning to See as the Mystics See*. He once said, "We cannot climb into higher stages of consciousness or psycho-spiritual awareness; we get there through what happens to us depending upon how we respond and then we will know we arrived."

And that is why the real Camino would pale in comparison to the pilgrimage in my own backyard.

Arlene Van Hove (avanhove@shaw.ca) is a therapist and a member of the Fleetwood CRC.

Greater than the sum of our parts

The church as family system

Rachel Boehm

Churches are systems made up of diverse and interdependent parts: formal leaders, lay leaders, members, seniors, families, youth. In an ecosystem, each plant and creature relies on the functioning of the other to thrive. So it is with church systems. Understanding the church as system is not new. In 1 Corinthians 12, Paul compared the church to the biological system of the body: "The body is a unit … though the parts are many, they form one body."

With much focus in recent years on pastoral excellence, many churches have concentrated their efforts on ensuring that their leaders are healthy and well equipped to do their work. Yet the work of even the healthiest of leaders can be sabotaged by a dysfunctional church. Systems thinking forces churches to look – not just at the health of their leaders – but at the congregation as a whole.

The Church as family system

Identifying the characteristics of healthy families and applying them to church systems provides a helpful framework for congregational health. Known as the Family Systems Theory, this approach is based on the work of Dr. Murray Bowen.

Bowen suggested that individuals cannot be understood independently, but rather as a part of the emotional unit, the family. "I am encouraged that seminarians these days are being trained in family systems thinking," says Rev. Martin Contant, Regional Leader for Christian Reformed Home Missions in Western Canada. "In many ways, the church is like a family, and pressures in one part of the system have repercussions in others parts of the system."

In a family system, members play different roles, responding to each other in certain ways according to their roles. Within the system, certain patterns of behaviour develop and persist. The actions of one family member influence the actions of all the others. This interdependence leads either to balance or dysfunction.

Attributes of healthy families include trust, communication, shared values and conflict resolution – characteristics that can also serve as markers of a healthy church.

Dealing with conflict

How families deal with conflict is indicative of their health, and this is true of churches, too. "Churches need to understand that healthy conflict is to be expected and worked through honestly and openly," says Rev. Adrian Van Giessen, Regional Leader for Christian Reformed Home Missions in Eastern and Central Canada. Churches avoid conflict to their own detriment. "Churches for a variety of reasons are 'conflict adverse'," Van Giessen says. "Church members rightfully love and care for each other deeply. Therefore, they often see conflict as unhealthy and unwelcome." However, as in families, unresolved conflict can fester and do lasting damage.

"Many churches allow conflict to go 'underground' because they think conflict is a bad thing or they simply don't know how to manage it," Contant adds. Contant recommends that churches seek out resources to help them learn to mediate peaceful solutions. Providing key leaders or volunteers with training in conflict resolution can be an excellent place to start.

Communication and trust

Another similarity churches share with families is the need to nurture openness and trust so that everyone can feel safe to contribute. "A healthy sense of trust in a church will allow those with gifts to use those gifts well," Van Giessen adds.

Trust is built on the foundation of good communication. "Most problems in the church can be traced back to inadequate communication between council and congregation," says Contant. Leaders can set the stage for good communication by regularly reporting to the congregation on decisions made and sharing the rationale that led them to the decision.

Church members can help keep the lines of communication open by asking questions, attending Annual General Meetings and encouraging council and committees to report regularly. When there are concerns, everyone should know where to bring them, and leaders should follow up on how concerns are resolved. When communication between councils and congregants flow both ways, people can begin to trust each other and develop healthy relationships.

> "Without the work of committed volunteers, the church cannot really accomplish its calling,"

Nurture gifts

In a healthy family, all members should be supported in identifying and using their gifts. Churches, too, need to consider how members' gifts are identified, nurtured and recognized.

"Without the work of committed volunteers, the church cannot really accomplish its calling," says Contant. "Healthy churches and leaders know how to encourage their volunteers," Contant says. "They say 'Thank you' often. They take an interest in some of the ministries and programs by asking volunteers about them, by actually visiting the ministry, and they keep in contact."

Bless people to flourish

Finally, Van Giessen urges churches to think big when it comes to nurturing leaders. Churches need to focus on "developing new leaders at every stage and ministry level in the church," he says, and then churches must free those emerging leaders to serve. "Don't micro-manage stuff. Give people clear mandates, some accountability structures and then let them go. Bless them to flourish."

1. Visit the Bowen Center online at **thebowencenter.org**. To learn more:

- Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach by Peter L Steinke, The Alban Institute (1996)
- How Your Church Family Works: Understanding Congregations as Emotional Systems by Peter Steinke, The Alban Institute (1996)

Rachel Boehm is a communications specialist and a freelance writer. She lives near Halifax, Nova Scotia.

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Column

Our World Today

Bert Hielema

Seeing the forest and the trees

March was a mad month for me: first the flu, a violent strain that drained my energy. Two days of misery and it was over. I guess I am basically a healthy guy. Then to Holland, and family meetings. At one time my wife and I had 40 brothers and sisters and their spouses there, but that number has now shrunk to less than half. A younger brother got us a comfortable house in a small village in Drenthe not far from Groningen where the bulk of our relatives live. There I developed the European version of this malady. Again two days of utter fatigue and it was over. I don't mind these ailments because they protect me next time these strains appear. There was no rain at all, even some sunshine and lots of crocuses!

Drenthe is a beautiful province. My younger brother and I walked for hours in what felt like an enchanted forest, complete with burial places hundreds of years old.

I imagined myself in a *Lord of the Rings* setting. The brochure suggested that we should ask permission to enter it.

We spent four nights in The Hague, smack downtown where my brother lives. The most striking aspect of this downtown is the lack of cars, but thousands of bikes and continuous public transportation. No wonder Europe uses half the energy we do while enjoying a standard of living at least equal to ours. The Hague is a city of forests. My brother and I spent more than an hour running through the woods surrounding the Royal Palace appropriately named *Huis ten Bosch* (House in the woods), also just minutes from downtown.

Huis ten Bosch (back view)

Canada's bounty

Now we are back home. Before leaving I had hung 12 covered maple syrup buckets out. They were overflowing when we returned, so I was right away busy boiling the stuff. Now, weeks later, I'm still busy tapping that wonderful sap and converting it slowly – it takes 35 liters to make one liter of syrup – into delicious brown sweetener.

I am an optimistic guy, believe it or not. I just got a permit to construct another building on our property, 12 by 24 feet. We need more space to store wood (for heating), a little wagon, a wheelbarrow and my city- and cross-country bikes. I bike to town, weather permitting. In the future, I may want to house chickens in this small building, or perhaps some goats.

I always look ahead. This past month I took my spade and turned over the first sod, intending to do an hour of digging every day to enlarge my vegetable garden 5 by 50 feet, expanding it to more than 2,000 square feet. It's a section that is quite productive, judging by the lush grass it sports in the spring and summer. With the world suffering from drought or lack of topsoil I want to become even more self-sufficient. Homegrown food saves transporting it thousands of kilometers from California or Prince Edward Island and it's fresh and healthier. We preserve it in our freezer, which is powered by the solar energy that provides about half of our electricity.

In whatever we do, we keep creation in mind. That applies especially to our bodies, which is why we are vegetarian. Three times per week we have a no-cook meal, consisting of lots of greens, onion, garlic, beets, tomatoes, carrots, lemon juice, olive oil and one cooked item – beans, either pinto, black, red, kidney or garbanzo.

Every night before we go to bed, I put a cup of large flake oats into a slow cooker, pour 3.5 cups of water in the bowl, plug it in, and the porridge is ready in the morning. With a dash of maple syrup, some blueberries, two tablespoons of ground-up flax seed and a spoonful of lecithin, plus a chopped apple, it gives us an excellent start to the day. In the evening I have one slice of "roggebrood," an easy-to-make healthy bread. With a bit of honey or cheese, it is a delicacy.

I try to walk my talk, and when I run, my mantra is "maranatha, Lord come quickly."

Bert Hielema has lived in Tweed, Ontario since 1975, where he used to be a commercial real estate appraiser.

Dutch roggebrood

Mix these three things and set aside:

2 cups Red River Cereal
2 ½ cups boiling water
¼ cup molasses

Sift together:

1 cup whole wheat flour
1 tsp *each* of salt, baking powder, and baking soda

Add the flour to the hot cereal and mix. Bake at 300 for 80-85 minutes in a greased loaf pan.

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Classifieds

Anniversaries

Wellandport, May 4, 1956 - Psalm 121 - Wooler, May 4, 2011

With much praise and thanksgiving, we are celebrating **55 Years of Marriage** with our parents, grandparents and great-grandparents

Jacob and Annie Vander Meulen (Colyn)

the Lord willing on May 4, 2011.

Dad and Mom, we thank you for the love, encouragement and support you have given to us over the many years, but most of all your Love for the Lord and each other. As we reflect on Psalm 121 – We know through much joy and sorrow – you have truly leaned on him in all aspects of your life together – and God has never left your side. You have been blessed and in turn have blessed many. What a celebration.

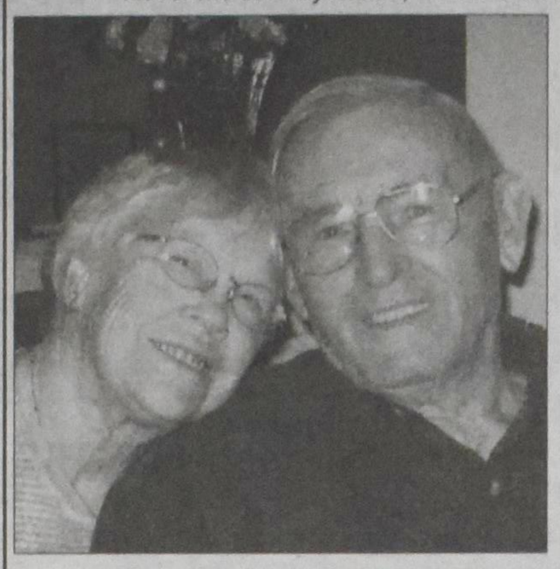
Love from us all:
Earl Vander Meulen (Rejoicing in Heaven – July, 2007) Sharon – Jennifer, Diana
Christine Smit & Luke Smit – Natalie & Dave, Ryan & Sarah, Robyn & Adam, Chad
Evelyn & Sid Tilstra – Alicia & Raymond, Matthew, Benjamin
Marlene & Jerry VanHolst – Michael, Tyler, Danielle
Elizabeth & Don Muldoon
Jacqueline & Michael Niemann – Nikita, Michael, Natasha
Andrew & Jennifer Vander Meulen – Taylor, William
8 great-grandchildren – Gavin, Damin, Troy, Brynlea, Logan, Landyn, Alex & Kyle

We invite you to join Dad and Mom and family in this celebration at an **Open House** on: Date: May 7, 2011
Time: from 1 - 3:30 p.m.
Where: Frankford Christian Reformed Church
149 King Drive, Frankford, Ontario

Home address: Jacob & Annie Vander Meulen
193 Jarvis St RR 1, Trenton ON K8V 5P4

1951 May 7 2011

As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:15



With joy and thanksgiving
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God's faithfulness to

Luke and Jeanette Brouwer
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with **60 years of Marriage**

Congratulations and much love
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What a blessing you are to us all.

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Thanks Be To God.

Jennie and Clarence Dykstra

celebrated their **60th Wedding Anniversary** D.V, April 12, 2011.
May the Lord continue to bless them.

Lots of love your children, grandchildren (20) and great-grandchildren (3).

6595 Fourth Line Road, North Gower ON K0A 2T0

Strathroy 1961 May 3 Port Colborne 2011

With joy and thanksgiving to our Lord, we

Geert Horinga and Jitske Horinga-Kingma

will celebrate our **50th Wedding Anniversary**
with our children, grandchildren,
and great-grandchild.

Albert Horinga
Barbara & Richard Gaboury
Anita McAuley and Roger – Ashley – Alexia; Lacey
James & Tammy Horinga – Felicia, Jacob, Lauren
Bernice Thewles – Robert, Jason
Marlene & Dave Johnson – Ryan, Robyn
Michael Horinga
Jeanette Belgrade & family
Shirley Mas & family

Please join us on May 7 for an **Open House**
at the Grace CRC from 2 - 4 p.m.
at 660 South Pelham Road, Welland, Ontario.

Home address: 2792 Chippawa Road
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With joy and thanksgiving to God,
the children and grandchildren of

Leo and Alice Visser

request the honour of your presence
to celebrate their
50th Wedding Anniversary
at an ***Open House***
on Saturday the 7th of May
two thousand and eleven
from 2:00 - 4:00 p.m.
Tollendale Village Square
274 Hurst Drive, Barrie

With love and Blessings,
from your children and grandchildren:

Ray & Arlene Borg
Joyana, Jonathon

Wes & Tracey Visser
Tyler, Jillayna, Brianna

Dolinda & Harold Bentum
Josiah, Rachel, Justin

James & Shereen Visser
Julia, David

Correspondence may be sent to:
Apt 305 - 278 Hurst Drive, Barrie ON L4N 0Z3

60th Wedding Anniversary

William and Dorothy Veenhof

May 1, 1951 - 2011

Once upon a time, in a land of windmills and heather fields, a young couple made a sacred vow. With nothing but love for each other, and hope-full trust in God as a sure Provider, they charted a course for a new life together, across the sea in Canada.

Celebrating this life-journey, navigated through 60 years of joy and sadness, we honor our parents for the heritage of faithfulness that blesses us and our children. Their compass has always been the Bright Morning Star, and His light is trustworthy and true for each generation.

With love,
Jacquie & Howard Vanderwier
Diane & Paul Droppert
Heather & Henry Kikkert
Anne & Martin Vyn
Will Veenhof (& Lynda)
Nicholas Veenhof
24 Grandchildren & 10 Spouses;
18 great-grandchildren (+ 3 happily expected)

Great is Your faithfulness, O God, our Father.
Morning by morning new mercies we see.
All we have needed Your hand has provided.
Great is Your faithfulness, Lord, unto us.

Home address:
Unit 130 - 1128 Vansickle Rd N
St. Catharines ON L2S 3W1

Obituaries

August 4, 1920 - March 25, 2011
Andijk, NL Edmonton, AB

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. John 6:47

Grace (Grietje) Zee nee **Gorter**

was gathered into her heavenly home.

Predeceased by her husband George (Gerrit) in 2004.

Lovingly remembered by her children
Ebeline and John Hawtin
Cor and Doreen Zee
Frank and Marlys Zee
Alfred Zee
Tena and Abel Homeman
Rosa and John Lindemulder
Annette and Will Greenwood
John and Cheryl Zee
27 grandchildren and 17 great-grandchildren

Correspondence: Ebeline Zee-Hawtin
901 - 10160 115th Street
Edmonton AB T5K 1T6

Jan de Koning

passed away suddenly and peacefully
on March 31, 2011 in his 87th year.

Jan served his Lord actively, with vision and commitment for many kingdom causes. We thank the Lord for this and celebrated his life at a memorial service in Holland Christian Homes on April 5. There is an empty place in our family, but also a heart full of gratitude for the prayers, cards, kind words and help we have received from our communities and friends in our grief.

He loved us all: his wife, Jane J. de Koning
Gerry and Pat de Koning, *Toronto*
Carolyn and Jeremy, Miles
David and Elizabeth, Sophie
Peter and Michelle
Neil and Klasske de Koning, *Lacombe*
Rachel and Reuben, Malia, Elijah, Luther
Karissa and Keith, Isabella, Anna
Jonathan and Sarah
Peter
Jack and Joan Vanderkooy, *Richmond Hill*
Matt and Lisa
Janelle and Steve, Jacob, Carter
Allison and Dan, Mason, Eli
Melissa and Harrolf
Hannah and Will
Jake and Janis de Koning, *Clinton*
Ellen and Joram
Andrew
Bethany and Gary
Alice de Koning and Yrjo Koskinen, *Boston*
Nick and Shelagh de Koning
Kelly
Daniel

Correspondence: Mrs. J. de Koning
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Joe Grootenboer
Retirement Celebration

Toronto District Christian High School

Over the past nearly four decades, kingdoms have risen and fallen, new teaching methods have been adopted and abandoned, and cutting edge technologies have been developed and discarded. But through it all, one thing has remained constant: Joe!

Join us on **April 28** at the school's spring membership meeting as we honour Joe Grootenboer for 38 years of faithful service among us.
Festivities begin at 8 p.m.; the membership meeting business will be completed by that time.

Toronto District Christian High School
377 Woodbridge Avenue
Woodbridge, Ontario L4L 2V7

info@tdchristian.ca www.tdchristian.ca

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Mark Vuorinen, conductor
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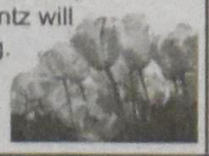
A **DUTCH SERVICE**
will be held on **May 15** in the **Ancaster** Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m.
Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching.
DVDs are available.



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Our website: www.halifaxchristianacademy.ca.

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Advertising

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Apr 28 Joe Grootenboer retirement celebration. Toronto District Christian High, 377 Woodbridge Ave., **Woodbridge**, Ont. See ad or www.tdchristian.ca for more information.

May 15 Dutch Service will be held in the Ancaster Christian Reformed Church at 3:00 p.m. Rev. Jacob Kuntz will be preaching. DVDs are available.

June 8 Hollandse Dag in **Moorefield**. Spreker Rev. Harry Vander Wendt. For info, call 519-638-2228. See ads in following issues.

Gehakt Ballen voor Soep (Meat Balls for Soup)

2 1/2 lb ground beef
1/2 tsp celery seed
1/2 tsp cloves
1 tsp nutmeg
1 tsp parsley
1 tsp pepper
1 good-sized onion, minced
3 eggs
6 rusks or bread crumbs
salt to taste

Mix and make meatballs. Add to soup, bake or fry.

You can add any of the following: basil, curry, paprika, marjoram, savory, thyme.

Do you have a recipe to share? Send it to admin@christiancourier.ca

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Christian Courier is published on the second and forth Mondays of the month. Deadline for each issue is 9 a.m. Tuesday, 13 days prior to publication date.

RATES: All personal and family announcements: $6.00 per square inch. **rose@christiancourier.ca**

Display advertising re. businesses and organizations: $8.00 per square inch. **ads@christiancourier.ca**

PHOTOS: There is a processing fee of $25 for the inclusion of a photograph with a personal or family announcement. **PERSONAL ADS:** *CC* would be pleased to handle your personal ad in an efficient and discreet manner. All correspondence is immediately forwarded unopened.

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40 YEARS OF SERVICE

News

CHP and the clarity of conviction

Cathy Smith

With 6000 party members across Canada, only 3000 short of the Green Party's total, the Christian Heritage Party (CHP) projects continued growth. On April 11, Party Leader Jim Hnatiuk spoke at a CHP evening in Wyoming, Ontario, encouraging party supporters as well as two local candidates, Mike Janssens and Chris Desormeaux-Malm. Citing letters received from Zambia, Pakistan, and Kenya, Hnatiuk highlighted the fact that ordinary citizens around the world long to have a similar Christian party included in their national politics. He pointed particularly to Rev. George Okura, a refugee from Kenya and one of CHP's candidates in Toronto, as the kind of committed Christian politician who knows the value of democracy from bitter experience.

Jim Hnatiuk

The poster in the lobby highlighted CHP themes such as Honesty& Integrity, the Importance of Family, Quality Health Care, Renewable Energy Sources, a Justice System that Works and the Protection of Rights and Freedoms. Hnatiuk spoke with enthusiasm on a number of these topics. Featured in particular were concerns about immigration, including a promise to resist the Islamization of Canada, and a determination to bring the issue of abortion back into national debate.

Strong applause greeted Hnatiuk's statements on pro-life and pro-family policies. CHP's platform includes a Family Care Allowance of $1000 a month to enable individuals to leave the work force to care for their children, or for family members who are disabled or elderly. This revenue neutral policy, says Hnatiuk, will open up new employment opportunities and, since healthy families are the bedrock stabilizing force in society, effect positive repercussions in our nation.

Cathy Smith (Cathy @ christiancourier.ca) is Features editor of CC.

Why CHP?

Founded in 1987, the CHP says that it exists to promote "proven Judeo-Christian principles of justice and compassion to Canada's contemporary public policy needs." Its name alludes to the desire to return to our country's Christian roots. The party is not affiliated with any one denomination or church. Although there are Christian members of Parliament in other parties, **chp.ca** argues, they are forced to toe the party line and thus cannot "bring their deepest convictions into parliamentary debates." In the last federal election, the CHP ran 59 candidates across Canada and won roughly 1 percent of the popular vote in each riding. *–Ed.*

ODDS AND TRENDS
– The Election edition

Too bad, Mr. Goodluck

President Goodluck Jonathan will have to wait a little longer to see if Nigerians are happy with how he's filled Yar'Adua's shoes. Already postponed from January, Nigeria's April election has been pushed back a second time. Polls opened on schedule, only to close again when ballot papers ran out. Pre-election violence killed at least 12 people, and the local press also reports cases of vote-bullying and corrupt registration practices. It's an uneasy time for Africa's most populous nation, with many blaming tension on the split between the Muslim north and the Christian south.

In good company

We are not alone: citizens of Latvia, Micronesia, Madagascar, Syria, Chad, Seychelles, Vietnam and Cyprus will be voting in their respective national elections in the month of May. Locally, however, your trip to the polling station might feel a little more isolated.

Studies have shown that between 60 and 70 percent of Canadians will do their civic duty by voting on May 2. In countries where voting is compulsory, such as Australia and Chile, voter turnout rates hover around 95 percent. In "The Case for Mandatory Voting in Canada," Mac Harb says that "our democracy depends upon the active participation of its citizens," and suggests that legislation making it illegal (or expensive) not to vote is necessary to quell the electoral crisis. As Canada's Chief Electoral Officer said, "The right to vote is only meaningful if you use it."

R.C. Sproul on how to vote

"How much weight should our opposition [to abortion] carry? I have purposed in my heart that I would never vote for a man for any office that is not committed to using every power at his disposal to protect and defend every unborn child. Never. Ever. If every Christian would simply make that simple pledge, then we would win this battle. We need to get rid of our strategies, and get on our knees in repentance. We need to stop negotiating with candidates over the bodies of dead babies."

–R. C. Sproul is a reformed theologian and pastor who writes at ***highlandsministriesonline.com.***

Vandezande on what to ask

With the Canadian federal election so close, it's time to call your Parliamentary candidates and get some answers before deciding how to vote. Long-time Christian social activist Gerald Vandezande outlines a few hard questions for MPs to get you started.

"The increasing reliance on food banks by 1.2 million Canadians is helping to create third world hunger conditions here in Canada. What will your party, and you as a candidate, do to end the shameful hunger among our neighbours?

What measures do you propose to pursue during your tenure to restore dignity to all our poor neighbours: low income, homeless, disabled, Aboriginal, new Canadians and seniors, many of whom now live in abject poverty and are losing hope for a better future?

How many affordable housing units will you and your party commit to building before the end of the 41st Parliament? How many will you build in this riding? What do you propose to solve the housing crisis in Canada for those whose income is disproportionately spent on rental costs to the detriment of eating and staying warm?"

–Gerald Vandezande in a press release called "Choices: Election 2011."

Angela Reitsma Bick

Elim Investment Opportunities

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